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ABSTRACT

Following a major policy statement on writing in the primary school, this document employs a threefold approach to examining the teaching difficulties involved in responding to children's writing. The first section considers expectations that teachers have of children as writers, children's intended meanings, and various kinds of responses to children's writing in different contexts. The pieces of writing examined indicate that, to effectively respond to children's writing, teachers must attempt to share meanings with the writer to uncover the text's implicit meanings. The second section examines conventions in the teaching of writing, including attitudes and significance, the relationship between content and conventions, and meaning and sentence structure. In short, this section argues that the development of formal skills should be dealt with in the context of the teacher's response to the content of a child's writing. The final section discusses teachers' responses to spelling errors, instruction, and testing. It emphasizes that spelling is not a "basic skill" in writing and is therefore of secondary importance to a child's effective written communication. Appendices treat (1) three ways of responding to children's writing, (2) class organization and school policy, (3) learning about words, and (4) language development and microcomputers. A 22-item, briefly annotated bibliography concludes the document. (JD)

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RESPONDING TO CHILDREN WRITING

Development Group on Language Arts
Scottish Committee on Language Arts in the Primary School

CS 210 040

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The Scottish Committee on Language Arts (SCOLA) a sub-committee of the Committee on Primary Education (COPE) was the group which initiated developments towards the production of this document. In March 1984, SCOLA's term of office came to an end and a Development Group on Language Arts under the direction of COPE has been charged to complete the unfinished work of SCOLA. This group has managed the document through the later draft stages to publication. A listing of the membership of SCOLA and of the Development Group on Language Arts will be found at the end of this document.

The Scottish Committee on Language Arts and the subsequent Development Group on Language Arts have had much helpful advice and comment from many teachers in working towards the publication of this document. In particular we should like to thank a group of teachers in Highland Region who were involved in the early stages of our work. But as will be apparent on reading this paper, we have had useful discussions with teachers and examples of children's work from all parts of Scotland and from all stages of the primary school.

Members of SCOLA and the Development Group on Language Arts have themselves participated in responding to children's writing in all the ways suggested in this document. We must therefore record our appreciation of all the teachers and especially all the children who accorded us the privilege of working with them.

Preface

In 1981 SCOLA published 'Hand in Your Writing', a major policy statement on writing in the primary school, which was endorsed by COPE. Since then a number of follow-up activities have taken place: a national conference in March 1982; meetings with education authority officials which stimulated various regional and divisional initiatives; teacher workshops and conferences; and many school-based discussions in which SCOLA members were invited to participate. SCOLA also set up a long-term national project on writing at the early stages, the 'Foundations of Writing' project (to be published 1986) and in 1983 'Mr. Togs the Tailor: a context for writing' was published. This presented a fully worked out example of one of the approaches to writing recommended in 'Hand In Your Writing'.

For many years, even before the publication of 'Hand In Your Writing', SCOLA had been under some pressure to produce a document on spelling in the primary school. For just as many years SCOLA had resisted this pressure: it had more important subjects to discuss and comment on in relation to reading, language at the early stages, Scottish English, poetry, and of course writing. In any case in recent years there have been some excellent publications on spelling (see for example the Bibliography appended to this paper).

It did nevertheless seem to be appropriate that one of the follow-up papers to 'Hand In Your Writing' should concern itself with the relationship between the formal correctness (including spelling) and the intended meanings of a child's writing. We hold that these two aspects are essentially inseparable at all stages in the writing process and in the teacher's response to the outcomes of that process. We believe that for the purposes of analysis, teachers would find helpful a threefold approach to the problems of responding to children writing involving:

responding to the intended meaning;
responding to the structures which convey that meaning; and
responding to the surface features through which the meaning is realised.

Thus we shall consider three aspects of responding to children writing: 'Meanings', 'Sentences and Structures', and 'Words and Spelling'.

We have adopted the conventional use of the personal pronouns 'she' to refer to the teacher, and 'he' to refer to the child, except where information indicates otherwise.

Contents

		Page
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
	PREFACE	7
1	INTRODUCTION About this paper: its organisation and how it may be used	9
2	MEANINGS Expectations of children as writers; analysis of the child's meaning; different kinds of response to different children and different writing contexts	12
3	THE CONVENTIONS: SENTENCES AND STRUCTURES The conventions in writing: attitudes and significance; relationship between content and conventions; meaning and sentence structure	33
4	THE CONVENTIONS: WORDS AND SPELLING Responding to spelling errors; learning to spell; testing spelling	44
	APPENDICES	
	1. Three ways of responding to children writing; interior monologue; written response; teacher-pupil conference	48
	2. Class organisation and school policy	54
	3. Learning about words	58
	4. Language Development and Microcomputers	64
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

Introduction

1. Tracey and the doorbell

A Primary 4 teacher had prepared a tape of familiar and unfamiliar sounds. The five children currently at work in the writing area had listened to the tape together, had tried to identify the sounds and had discussed them in terms of their likes and dislikes. Various reactions, predictable and otherwise, had been given to 'purring cat', 'scratching nail', 'frying bacon', 'school bell' and so on. The writing task was 'Sounds I Like'. When the teacher joined the group he asked Tracey to read her writing to the others.

Tracey: 'I like the sound of the doorbell's ringing because it is tingly.'
Teacher: That's good, 'it is tingly'. What is tingly?
Tracey: It's the sound and the feeling.
Teacher: It's both? What makes it tingly for you? What usually happens when the doorbell goes? What does the sound mean to you?
Tracey: I have to go and answer it.
Teacher: Somebody is there. Who might it be?
Tracey: A friend asking me to come out to play.
Teacher: It might be the postie with a parcel for you.
Tracey: (laughs) It might be a policeman . . .
Teacher: To say . . .?
Tracey: He's wanting to search your house . . .
Teacher: . . . or that somebody's had an accident, or . . . It could be any number of things. So it's an excitement that you feel?
Tracey: Uh-huh.
Teacher: You get all tingly when the doorbell goes because it is something different. Can you try and put that down?

Tracey's final version of her piece was this:

I like the sound of the doorbell's ringing because it is tingly. As I go to answer it I am excited because I don't know who is there, and get all tingly too.

The teacher noted in his record against Tracey's name:

'CONFERENCE 2.11.84 'Sounds I Like'. Useful extension of idea in conference. Clear awareness of the structure of the written sentence.'

2. Some questions

The incident just reported may raise questions in teachers' minds; but teachers who have lived for some time with uncertainties regarding their strategies in responding to children's writing may come to the reading of this document with further questions also.

To what are we responding when we examine children's writing?

What analytical skills do we need to make an effective response?

Should we respond in different ways to personal writing, to fantasy writing, to 'scientific' writing . . . any other kind of writing?

What kinds of response best help the able writer, or the less able writer?

How should we respond to errors in the use of the writing conventions?

Should the child always be present when we respond to his writing?

What organisational features of the writing task allow manageable and effective responding to take place?

How often should the teacher respond in detail to any particular child's writing?

These, and other questions, will not always be given specific answers in this document, but we would hope that the document will provide a resource and a context through which teachers can begin to provide answers that are appropriate to their own classrooms and to their own schools. New questions are continually arising. The following two are touched on, but undoubtedly there will be a lot more to be said.

What is the place of the microcomputer in developing strategies for responding to children writing?
What are the significant elements in a whole school policy on children's writing?

3. Selection and presentation of children's writing in the document

Much of the writing in this document is personal writing. Such writing may form only a small part of the writing done in school but discussion with teachers indicates that they discriminate between personal writing and writing within subject areas. An examination of a large sample of writing demonstrated that the teaching of writing was largely concentrated within the area of personal writing. It was here that teachers set up specific writing tasks and made their most detailed responses. It was also here that teachers declared their greatest uncertainty.

Both 'Hand in Your Writing' and 'Mr. Togs' advocate writing within a context. Here we present a number of pieces of writing out of context; that is, for most of the examples of writing discussed in this paper very little information is given as to how they arose or what the precise nature of the writing task was. This is not a denial of what was said in 'Hand in Your Writing' or 'Mr. Togs' about how one responds to children's writing once it has been produced. Nevertheless, we have found time and again it is not only possible but extremely useful to analyse a piece of children's writing given only minimal information about the writer and the writing context. Of course, in the classroom situation the teacher is bound to take into account her awareness of the child and her knowledge of the writing task in making her response. But there are other more generalised awarenesses which are sometimes left out of account in the teacher's perception of the child and his writing. It is these generalised awarenesses – of coherence, of explicitness, of structure, of involvement – that allow the teacher to evaluate fully an individual child's progress and to identify the path that development might take.

Accordingly, for each sample of children's writing presented in this document, information is given about the class stage and sex of the writer, and brief comment is made on the context of the writing situation when this is appropriate.

4. Organisation of this document

The document accepts the view of child development outlined in 'Hand in Your Writing' and the pieces are related to this. Section 2: Meanings pays particular attention to what the child seeks to express through his writing and how far the writing meets the tasks set by the teacher. In Section 4 the conventions of writing are related to the conveying of meaning, especially sentence structure and punctuation. Spelling is discussed, not just in its own right, but as part of a child's more general awareness of words.

The Appendices, offer a number of activities that are designed to extend mastery over the writing conventions. Various types of teacher response are examined and the implications of all this for school policy and school organisation are considered. Lastly some comments are provided on the use of micro-computers in a Language Development Programme.

The reader may feel somewhat overwhelmed by the diversity of activities presented in the document and may wonder how all of these may be fitted into the school programme. The document presents a variety of responses to a range of writing needs. A teacher will select those that seem appropriate to her own situation. As always, what is more important than individual activities is the teacher's development of a consistent and productive attitude towards children's writing.

5. How this document could be used

We see this document being used in different ways and at different levels:

1. by a regional or divisional language arts panel in helping to reformulate guidelines, or perhaps as a reference source along with other COPE publications;
2. by a primary adviser in setting up workshops or study groups to review schools' policies on writing, after initial reactions to 'Hand in Your Writing' have been assimilated;
3. by a head teacher and school management team in examining existing school policy in writing, perhaps looking at consistency of practice and at developmental progress through the school;
4. by class teachers in reviewing their existing practices in writing, in examining purposes in setting writing tasks, in considering different strategies, in responding to children's writing and in organising the setting up of writing groups.

But perhaps the best way to get started is for a group of teachers to discuss a sample of children's writing with one another, or for an individual teacher to try some teacher-pupil conferences as suggested in Appendix 1, or for an individual or group of teachers to think about the attitudes that teachers and pupils bring to the writing task. Each of these approaches is likely to disturb existing preconceptions. This document will be best used by those who are prepared to be disturbed.

SECTION 2

Meanings

Unless we have an obsession about correctness or neatness most of us respond to what a child is trying to express. We will not get very far in helping the child develop as a writer if we do not take what he says seriously. Children are not producing only 'wee stories' of some entertainment value nor are they only providing evidence of their mastery of the conventions.

1. What expectations do we have of a child who writes successfully?

We start with the assumption that the child wrote about something that interested, amused, excited or puzzled him; or that he wrote to influence, persuade, question or reason in ways that would have significant outcomes for him.

We would wish that the child expressed this in such a way that not only did he capture the significance of it for himself but that he shared it with us.

We would expect that the details the child chose to incorporate in his writing were relevant to his purpose, carried the meaning he wished to express and had meaning for us.

We would expect that words were used with such precision that the meaning was unambiguous and that the uniqueness of even commonplace experience was communicated.

We would expect that any images or comparisons used were relevant and helped us appreciate what the child wished to express.

We would expect that the sentence structures held the various items together economically and in such a way that the relationships were clear. We would expect that the sentences had such variety that the piece read easily.

We would expect that the overall shape of the piece helped us follow what was being communicated.

We would expect that if the writer sought a wide audience the conventions of writing would have been observed.

2. Some problems in making a response

In discussing children's writing we have to keep referring to the words children use and the sentence structures into which these words are put. This may sound as if the improvement of writing were a matter of vocabulary and grammar. Teachers may talk about finding a 'better word'. A 'better word' would be one that held a more precise meaning and the child's use of that word depends not so much on the range of the child's vocabulary as on the sensitivity with which the child responds to his experience. Similarly, the child's handling of the sentence, which is one of the important differencs between speech and writing, depends not so much on his understanding of grammar as on the intellectual ability to see relationships between items. **This is the difficulty in responding to writing; we have to make contact with the intellect, imagination and sensitivity behind the words but we can do this only through the words.** There may be teachers who believe that a child's awarenesses are so limited that the teacher's imposition of her own awarenesses on the child constitutes learning. Other teachers may feel inhibited in making a response to the content of a child's work in case damage is done to the child's expression of what is important to him.

3. Making a helpful response

A Primary 4 class had been reading Lucy Boston's 'The Castle of Yew'. This led to discussion and to art work and writing on themes parallel to those in the book. One was on being in an empty, lonely place. The class was set to write on 'emptiness'.

One night I was walking along a street and I hear a strainge noise I went to see what it was and suddenily I saw a big mansion it looked so empty and it just came out of thin air I got frightend and then I heard a voice from somewhere but it just went away again I don't know how I heard it because no one lived there. Only all the little animals. I found an old rocking chair it was all cobwebs. I found a little black cat and then a bat came flyin past me. I did get frightened then. So I knew that the place was haughted. There was only me in the house. So I started to explore the house. After I explored it I went home and told Mother and Father about it.

The Teacher as Reader

We cannot dictate to children what they should feel when they think on emptiness but we can say what their expression of it means for us. As readers we may recognise that this Primary 4 child has ability but we may feel that his vision of emptiness does not extend or illuminate ours. The child uses a setting and incidents derived from his reading or viewing. There is nothing wrong with that but he does not use these to express a convincing sense of emptiness. Whatever the writing may evoke for the child is not being communicated to the reader. The narrative line is a hindrance here as the writer seems to be drawn towards the telling of a story of the supernatural. Items common to such stories – strange voices, cobwebs, black cats – are introduced and discarded. The child cannot maintain the story-line which falls away into a most conventional ending.

As readers we may say to the writer (although not necessarily in these words): 'This may be your impression of emptiness but, for reasons which I am prepared to state, it does not make contact with mine and it does not convince me.'

In saying this we may have to accept that what we say about emptiness may have no meaning for the child – he may reject our comments and go his own way. Where matters of fact are not concerned we cannot impose our own interpretation of experience. Our comments may lead a child to review his experience or they may reveal inconsistencies in his interpretation; that is as much as we may expect.

The Teacher as Teacher

As teachers we may regret that a child is not using the possibilities that writing offers. Writing has its own excitements but it is away from the onward rush of conversation. The child is in control. He can slow down. He can stop and reflect. He can modify the piece as he reads it over. He may come back in a day or two, read it over and decide to make changes.

With these possibilities open to him we might expect that the child would express what he had experienced or learned with a precision not always possible in the improvisation of speech. Speech is generally less explicit than writing and the kind of details we anticipate in writing may not be offered in speech unless asked for by the listener. Writing allows the writer to step out of the flow of events and to comment on what he finds important, interesting or curious.

The writer has competence and his writing contains a number of possible points for development but he has not broken away from the push of a narrative that echoes how he might tell a story in speech. We ask for nothing remarkable; remember that the child had been involved for several days in reading and discussing a sensitively written story and was given a clear prescription by the teacher.

Perhaps the child cannot extract from memory or imagination those things that would evoke a sense of emptiness without the stimulus of conversation. Perhaps he doesn't appreciate what is expected of him in written communication. Perhaps this explains why the child has to rely on a story line and incidents that derive from reading or viewing. This is a theme to which we will return several times in this document.

4. Satisfying the purpose

We look at the writing of a Primary 4 child who seems to have difficulty in understanding what is expected of her when she writes. The girl was considered 'difficult to motivate'.

A Visit to Rothesay

Last Thursday I was away a boat trip. And the whole school went and mums and dads were allowed to come. And when we got on the boat we sailed over to Rothesay and you could get off if you wanted to or you could stay on. But I got off the boat. And I went to the castle and I went on the jumping castle and then I went for something to eat.

As this visit was related to work in environmental studies, we may suppose that the teacher's purpose in setting the piece of writing would relate to this. There is no evidence in the piece of any informed awareness of the environment.

What did the girl see as the purpose of the writing? This is difficult to identify as there seems to be little that she wishes to say about her visit. What we have is an unsuccessful attempt to report on the whole day through an almost haphazard selection of items.

The first response the teacher might make would be to ask the girl: 'What is it you want to say about Rothesay?'

The overall shape of the piece is weak. We simply have a piece cut from time. The child is faced with the common problem of what to select. Where does the event begin and end? The child might be asked to consider various openings. Had she been excited about going on this visit? If so, her story could start with her anticipation of the visit. Would it be better to start with her first view of Rothesay? Did she look back on the events of the day? The story might then start with her in bed recalling the day's events.

The end is weak. The day simply fritters out. Where could the story end – the ship pulling away from the pier or the girl's return home?

The girl has given little thought to her readers. The event is not well 'located'. The fact that this is a school visit to Rothesay emerges almost fortuitously. There is the lack of precise detail and the expectation that readers will know about Rothesay Castle and appreciate what a 'jumping castle' is.

The things that this child cannot do well are important in writing where there is no immediate feedback from readers. The child does not know what it is she wants to communicate. She cannot select significant items or express them with any precision. She cannot impose an effective shape on the writing. She has little sense of audience.

What we can't tell from the writing alone is whether the girl has nothing to say about the visit to Rothesay or whether she cannot express what she has to say through writing where she is without the support and stimulus of a conversational group.

Before responding to items in the child's writing the teacher might ask herself questions about her own role.

Was my prescription of the task clear enough? Did pre-writing activities alert the child to what she might pay attention to or, if after the visit, help her in her recall of the day?

Is it a mistake to ask young children to recall events of a whole day?

Does this demand considerable skill in selection and organisation? Would it have been better to ask the child to focus on one aspect of the day?

Have I any right to assume that this activity has any meaning for the child?

Do I appreciate how difficult it is for many children to communicate without the support of the speech situation?

How might the teacher respond to this piece of writing? The child has to be helped to find some purpose in her writing. What she has written appears to have little meaning for her – whether this meaning derives from her personal relationship with the events or from the necessities of a school subject. The girl may have to be helped to find a standpoint which helps her select details and to organise these. If the child can adopt a stance relative to the event then many of the weaknesses in her writing would disappear. The child should be encouraged to think of her audience. They were not with her; they cannot ask eliciting questions. What might they need or wish to know?

At this stage little would be gained by asking the child to rewrite her work as the raw material of writing is not accessible to the child. However something might be gained from her writing short pieces – even lists of single words and phrases – about the boat trip, the first sight of Rothesay, feelings during the day, dislikes and disappointments, noise, colour, movement – so that her recollections of the day may be revived and so that the meaning that this visit had for her might emerge.

The influence of meaning on the selection of detail and on vocabulary and structure is further examined in the following piece of work by a Primary 6 boy who was regarded as being above average ability. The class had been reading an extract from a novel in which feelings of guilt were explored. After a class discussion the children were set to write on an incident of their own choosing, expressing the sense of guilt which they felt.

My friends and I once went to Bothwell Park to collect chestnuts and to fish. At first we were going to play in the park nearer the River Clyde for at least half an hour but my friend, Andrew, suggested that we

should go back home to collect our fishing rods and fishing nets. Then Colin said, 'I have it. We'll go to Bothwell Golf Course and see if we can be caddies.' So we all went and crossed the main road and when we got to the course they all dared me to run and when the ball was going into the hole to pick it up and through it back at the golfer. I was so stupid that I did it and when I threw it back it hit the man. All of us ran like mad and the golfer shook his golf club at us but we were too far away and we easily escaped.

This is a competent piece of writing. Has the child satisfied the demands of the task set?

A reading of the piece would indicate that he has not. The prewriting activities had directed the child's attention towards the expression of a sense of guilt. The child has produced a well-handled narrative which is concerned with the reconstruction of events in time. There are many occasions on which this piece would have been acceptable but this is not one of them.

The teacher's response will be one of qualified approval.

Again the teacher may ask herself if her prescription had been precise enough. The way in which the task was actually presented to the class is important. **Discussion with children about what they understand of the teacher's instructions demonstrates that they may understand the words but not the expectations behind them.** 'Tell me all about . . .' may mean for the child a recollection which is extensive in time while for the teacher it may mean a collection which is intensive in detail. This child has chosen to write about an incident that occasioned a sense of guilt; the guilt is taken for granted and not expressed.

The teacher's response to the child should inform him that he has not sastisfied the demands of the writing task. The child might be asked to consider the responses that the various participants including himself might make to the incident and to jot down words which express what he thinks they might feel. These words could be discussed with the teacher or lists compiled by members of the writing group might be compared.

An examination of this piece shows an almost total absence of words which express the quality of this experience or of responses to it. Such an absence need not mean that this boy is not aware of such things nor that he lacks a vocabulary adequate to express them. In conversation, if such things were deemed to be of interest, eliciting questions would be asked. Left on his own in writing this child chooses to concentrate on the events which comprise this incident.

The child might be asked to consider where his reconstruction of the event could start. This child is about two-thirds into his story before he comes to the critical incident. As this is a common fault the problem posed by finding a suitable opening might be discussed within the writing group.

Although the child is a competent writer his concentration on events in time has encouraged his use of some loosely constructed sentences resembling those of speech. 'So we all went . . .' The child is not using the possibilities provided by writing to reflect on what he wishes to express and to go beyond the straightforward recounting of events.

This is a piece of writing which would have been acceptable had there been a different task set. There is a case for this boy being asked to re-write the piece but starting with the ball-throwing and concentrating on people's reactions and his own sense of guilt.

Here are two pieces of writing both from within unit studies from children's fiction. The first is by a Primary 4 boy and followed the reading of Chapter One of Barbara Willard's 'The Penny Pony'. The child had to write on the achieving of a desired goal. The second is by a Primary 5 girl and follows the reading of the chapter on the toys' party in Laura Ingalls Wilder's book 'On the Banks of Plum Creek'.

Something I had always wanted

One day me and my pal wanted to get a guinea pig. One day Billy thought we could help people so we helped the whole street. We cleaned the door steps, tidied the back garden then after we did all that. We counted the money. We had seventy two pence and we just had to put a half pence to get a guinea pig. But I had a one pence so I put that in we went down the town centre and back up with a guinea pig. We called it susan. We made a little cage and put it in and kept it about a year and two weeks ago it died.

My favourite toy

My favourite toy is a Koala Bear. It has lovely soft fur and it came all the way from Australia. It has lovely big green eyes. In the middle of its face it has a magnificent black and chuby nose. It sits up splendidly on

my window-sill all day. It has fantastic cudly fur and it is real fur. It has lovely scratchy claws. It is really a georgous toy.

Would we wish to say that one of these pieces is better than the other? One of the less desirable effects of the creative writing movement was the over-valuing of writing which expressed sensory awareness or emotional response. There might be a tendency to prefer the second piece to the first for that reason.

The first piece meets the demands of the writing task in a most acceptable way for a Primary 4 child.

Although the opening is confused by memories of conventional openings the child clearly states his need and how he intends to satisfy it. There is a full account of the getting of the money and the purchase of the guinea pig. The piece has a nice shape to it and the ending is effective.

There is some weakness in the punctuation of the sentence and some redundancy in the middle section but this is a clear and uncluttered account of an activity.

Of course the child could have written of something else – his longing for a guinea pig or his delight in having it – but echoing the model provided by the book he wrote about the achieving of his desire utilising the possibilities in written language for a clear and coherent statement.

The second child's purpose is quite different so she draws on different areas of language to achieve this. Her purpose demands she uses descriptive elements in language and since she is not dealing with a process in time she is nudged towards sentence structures that are somewhat repetitive.

There are weaknesses. Some items in the description of the toy are good but others are hackneyed and the teacher might direct the child towards the introduction of some variety in sentence structures.

Both pieces of writing meet the demands of the writing task and exploit the possibilities inherent in written language.

Of the four pieces of writing discussed in this section it may be claimed that the first satisfied no purpose that could have been identified by the child or the teacher and failed to use the possibilities of writing; the second was a competent piece of writing but failed to satisfy the writing task; the third and fourth, while containing weaknesses, used the possibilities of writing to satisfy the different tasks defined by the prewriting activities.

5. Falling back on group meanings and values

We have stressed the importance of a clear definition of the task and of the contexts provided for writing in helping a child identify why he is writing and in giving him access to details that may support the expression or communication of that purpose. It may be felt that children should be able to do this for themselves. Unfortunately the child's social environment may not teach him how to meet the demands of writing tasks, especially since these are almost completely school tasks. In conversation, purpose and supporting details may be provided for the child by the speech situation; adults may accept partial or inexact accounts from children, filling in missing details from their own experience; conversation may not stress certain aspects of experiences that are valued in school.

Here two children tackle two writing tasks set by school. Both have to do with the child's response to a situation; the first has to do with the emotions and the second with sensory awareness. Conversation does not always demand a particularly precise expression of either.

A Primary 5 girl in an inner-city school had been working in a language theme that considered various emotions. The children discussed, read, drew pictures and wrote. The child was asked to write on the happiest day she could remember.

My Happiest Day

The happiest day in my life was my last birthday. My mum and dad gave me a new gold bracelet. My uncle bobby gave me two pounds and my auntie gave me a pound. My gran gave me new fur gluvs and my big cousin gave me tights my best freind gave me sweets.

Considering the context within which this was written we may feel that this piece is disappointingly materialistic. We may feel that had the child been discussing this topic with her teacher she might have talked about something else, but her birthday was fresh in her mind and birthdays are supposed to be happy affairs. Her family love her, but it is unlikely that anyone will have discussed happiness with her. The commonest question asked about birthdays is 'And what did you get for your birthday?'

Everyday conversation may not develop the ability to talk easily about emotions unless specific questions are asked. The child resorts to expressing those things her group seems to value – possessions and money.

It should be realised that the task set this child is a most demanding one. She has to choose the happiest day she can remember and then she has to select and organise within that day. Would the teacher find this an easy task? Again the teacher may have to think about the nature of the task set the child. It would have been more helpful if the task had concentrated the child's attention on a more closely-defined aspect of her experience. The child does not really appreciate what the task demands and so she falls back on how she would tackle this question within a group conversation. Little may be gained by asking the child to rewrite this piece. More may be gained by setting a more accessible and more tightly-defined task – as we will illustrate later.

The second piece was written by a Primary 4 girl in a school in a small country town where the festivals of the year were all well-honoured. The writing was part of a Hallowe'en theme. This was largely art-based with a strong emphasis on witches. Some research had been done into Hallowe'en customs and there had been the reading of appropriate poetry and some prose. On the day following Hallowe'en the children wrote about their experiences while out guising. This is a potentially rich topic which the child tackled in a restricted way.

Hallow'en
Last night I was out gizing. I dressed up as a Spanish lady. I got lots of money n nuts to. I got sweety sigarets a tangareen and an Orange. Also I got tablets.

We accept that the child delights in getting things, but is this the only meaning that Hallowe'en can have for her? There is little of the excitement of Hallowe'en or the apprehension of parading in grotesque costumes through dark streets. It may be argued that this writing may represent all that Hallowe'en meant to the girl. If so, then both the theme and the teacher's presentation have been ineffective. Possibly the prescription is not precise enough; a title like 'Out in the in the Dark' might have been more effective in focussing the child's attention on her experiences. The spelling and punctuation errors are serious but once more they can wait until the teacher and child have investigated and resolved the fundamental question of what goes on when one writes.

Where children find it difficult to draw on their 'personal' experiences to meet the demands of a writing task there is some advantage to be derived from asking children within a writing group to pool their awarenesses of some limited aspect of experience.

Here a Primary 3 group have made up a list of things that made them happy.

Things that make me happy
holding my wee brother
helping mum bake
being out at night with the lights
shopping with gran
being in the dancing display

After discussion within their group Primary 4 children made up lists of what various emotions meant for them.

Unhappiness
unhappiness is when nobody plays with you
unhappiness is rain on a holiday
unhappiness is wearing school uniform
unhappiness is going to bed early
unhappiness is watching mum and dad go out

Anger
anger is not eating your dinner
anger is shouting names
anger is pushing your little brother
anger is staying in your room
anger is breaking a cup and not saying sorry

Activities like this help overcome some of the isolation of writing. Discussion of such topics within the

group may evoke responses that a child could not find for himself. Each of the lines of these 'poems' contains the germ of a story which a child may develop on subsequent occasions.

When children have an inadequate idea of how to communicate through writing there may be little to be gained from asking them to rewrite or to deal with conventional errors. Such children need to feel some purpose in writing and they have to be able to find material to support that purpose. Short pieces of controlled writing focus attention on possibilities.

6. The child and the elaboration of personal meaning

If we were able through some time-lapse process to watch over the years a child build up his awareness of the same event it might be like watching overlays being built up on an overhead projector. The original awareness will always be there and even the adult may choose to express that simple awareness at certain times, e.g. moments of emotion, but as the child develops in experience and in cognitive ability he may lay down more and more complex patterns of awareness and response. If we accept that children tend to follow the same developmental path, but in their own time, a path that takes them to a standpoint from which they may look at themselves engaging with experience, allowing them to comment on themselves and to appreciate the significance of the experience, then we may respond to children at various stages along the path with greater insight and sympathy.

Such a developmental path is discussed in 'Hand In Your Writing', and now we look at the writing of children who view experience from various points along that path.

It may seem strange to speak of young children imposing order on experience but that is what language enables them to do.

Here is a story written by a Primary 1 child.

Mummy bandaged my knee. I cut it when I fell over a stone.

This seems an unremarkable story until we realise that the child could have no experience of that sequence of events. What happened was that the child fell over a stone, cut his knee and his mother bandaged it.

This five-year-old has completely reversed the order in which the events occurred. Why? Possibly because the most important thing for him was his mother's bandaging of his knee. The child has imposed his meaning on the events.

Each of us may interpret similar experiences in our own personal way. Here are two P6 boys who have written on the theme of getting up in the morning. The first boy's piece was one-off and the second was written after an extended reading of Dylan Thomas. (Only extracts are given.)

When I waken up I wake my mum up or my sister. I get dressed washed and I let shep my dog out. I bring the milk in. I go back up stair and turn the fish tank light on, or when everyody is asleep my dog starts to bark at the Mailman . . .

The sun's coming up over the hills. The seagulls are screaming. The petticoats are getting lifted from over the chairs. Ah, the false teeth are getting put back where they belong. Now you'll hear the shouting and the babies crying. The over-nine year olds are going for milk. Porridge is on the boil . . .

Both these extracts contain just over fifty words. They have about the same proportion of verb groups. None of the verbs used is particularly unusual. All the words used could appear in everyday conversation. Sentences tend to begin 'subject-verb' in both pieces and both are written as a series of short statements. The first uses 'I' and 'my' several times while the second does not.

Why is the second livelier and more effective than the first?

The answer lies in the selection of significant details – or in the case of the first, the non-selection of significant details. This is an extract from an exhaustive rehearsal of the events of getting up. The selection made by the second child is at times surprising and at times almost audacious: 'Ah, the falsé teeth are getting put back . . .' The details in the second are presented with precision; the particularity of 'the petticoats are getting lifted . . .' as against the generality of 'I get dressed washed . . .'

The self-awareness of the second is augmented by the use of speech devices. 'Ah, the false teeth . . .' and 'Now you'll hear . . .' Although the verbs in the two pieces are quite commonplace, in the first piece they have to carry most of the meaning – as this is concerned with what the child did – whereas in the

second they occur within vivid statements which encapsulate various aspects of the early morning. This produces a kaleidoscopic effect which generates a feeling of morning. The child finds his meaning in more than the simple retelling of events.

The first piece is nearer to speech in its selection of details and in its structures, while the second captures the effect of speech at times. The second child uses the possibilities of writing in ways that are not yet available to the first.

Next we have a Primary 6 girl writing about Bonfire Night within a Guy Fawkes theme which contained historical investigation, reading, art and writing. She is above average ability and this ability has led her to acquire certain mannerisms in her writing. It is interesting to compare this piece with the one on Hallowe'en – allowing for differences in age.

We all huddled round the bonfire in the bitter cold. We watched the stately Guy with his top hat, old jacket and baggy trousers peer down at us like a shepherd watching over his flock. Then a lit match was thrown into the bonfire. The little children's sparklers fizzed and cracked in tune with the fire. The orange flames rose up like mountains of fire. The rockets shot into the sky living up to their name. Then the taper of a cart wheel, which acted as a button on the guy's coat, caught light and flew round in circles. The mud that was around didn't bother us. The bright colours of the fireworks kept us warm. Dancing jumping-jacks cracked at our feet as we watched the coloured sprays. A large roman candle was lit. Then stars of all different colours came out of it and a fireball shot out of the end. Sad to say it was getting late. I was last to leave. As I looked behind me what remained of the bonfire glittered and cracked until there was only a patch of black ashes to remind me of the glowing red bonfire with its stately guy.

This girl acts as our eyes in describing bonfire night. There is much on which to comment in the precison of the perceptions and the effective shape of the piece as it moves from the children huddled in the cold, through the excitements of the fireworks to the implied, drawn-out sadness of the final sentence. Both this and the previous piece move away from a dependence on narrative although in both a slow movement through time provides a skeleton on which the writing builds, avoiding shapelessness. The girl has to draw on a wide range of words to convey the quality of those things that she notices. We see this in her verbs – 'huddled; fizzed and cracked; glittered and cracked' and in adjectives – 'stately; baggy; dancing; glowing red'. The child uses metaphorical language to share her awarenesses with us – 'like a shepherd; like mountains of fire'. The girl uses a simple sentence structure as did the boy who wrote the previous piece. This in no way demonstrates a limitation in her language skills; she uses those structures that are appropriate to what she wants to do and that is to build up a total effect through detailed impressions. This also suggests the movement and life of the fire and the fireworks.

It is in the use of impressionistic writing over a number of pieces of writing that the girl's mannerisms show. Her style avoids some of the difficulties inherent in more complex structures and allows for the rapid build-up of effect. Perhaps the teacher's response might be to encourage the child to use her skill in the construction of other sentence types like the long final sentence which she uses so effectively after the short 'I was last to leave' to suggest the sad ending to this exciting night.

She is a competent girl and the teacher can discuss technique with her. One aspect of the teacher's response is to help children acquire 'the tricks of the trade'; to extend control over the possibilities of writing. This girl is moving further away from the language of speech and those things that speech commonly communicates. She uses language which would be artificial and inappropriate in conversation. She seizes the possibilities in writing to recreate an event. We may surmise that she could express what she wishes to express only through the opportunities that writing gives her to withdraw from experience and to reflect on it.

We have read two pieces of writing by children who are able to catch and communicate what the experience of morning and bonfire night meant for them. The following are examples of writing by children able to reflect on and to make comments on their experiences. Both retain a story element that characterises much of children's writing but telling a story is not their primary concern.

A girl in Primary 6 was writing within a unit study on Ivan Southall's novel 'Ash Road'. She had been considering an extract beginning – 'The creek was his own private secret . . .'

My Secret Place

My secret place is above the window inside the room because a good deal of wood is chipped away and I can manage to stuff a few bits and pieces there. I put things like hair clasps and rings but the silliest things

I plant are bits of fluff from an old pillow. Once I dreamed that in a storm the window flew open and then a fluff storm came pouring in from the top of the window but of course that was only a most unlikely dream. Because I don't want any of my family to find out about my secret place I often change my own curtains because if ever my mother ever thought of looking on top of my window she would be shocked to find lots of fluff, rings and wrappers from chocolate there and I often think of her phoning up the corporation and saying: 'I have a complaint to make. I just found fluff on the top of the window.' However, I don't think that would happen. There was one time when my secret place was nearly discovered. It happend one night when I was lying in my bed and it dawned on me that I hadn't seen my secret place for some time so I got up and stood on top of the small toy cupboqrd and reached to the top of the window and just as I was going to grab some fluff to see if it was sti!l there my little sister woke up and said, 'What are you doing?' Well, I have never been so frightened and I had to say, 'Oh, just drawing the curtains.' I did so and then I went to bed.

This child meets the demands of the writing task but in a very personal way. Her writing has an easy conversational tone to it, but it is not speech written down. She is commenting on her own behaviour and not just reporting it. Again the reader is aware of the precision with which details are presented and the appropriate selection of these details. The effective use of the first person and the selection of certain colloquial words or phrases sustains this feeling of the girl talking to us, words like 'stuff; grab; plant'; and phrases like 'bits and pieces; silliest things'.

The child is able to move out of her reconstruction of events to comment on them and it is obvious she appreciates the absurdity of what she does. This gives a feeling of maturity to the writing. She can enter into the possible responses of others and contruct fantasy events related to her behaviour, e.g. the brief, potential drama of the mother's phone call.

Such an approach to the recall of experience makes certain demands on the child's writing skills. Despite the conversational tone of the piece the child's purpose, commenting on her own behaviour, requires that she uses coordination and clauses of reason, time, result, purpose, condition, adjective clauses and noun clauses objective and in apposition. Most children will use many of these constructions in talk – if the situation elicits them – but many children will find it difficult to show relationships between items with such precision when they write.

If we think back to the boy and the golf course story we will realise that he did not draw upon such a wide variety of structures. This may not be because he didn't have access to such forms but because what he had set himself to write didn't demand this. **Sentence structure is a function of the meaning the child wishes to express and not just of his awareness of grammar.** We shall return to this point in the next section.

The next piece of writing is one of a series on friendship. The class had been discussing how attitudes to people can change. It is written by a Primary 6 girl who was not considered to have any particular talent for writing.

Bobby Jarvis

When I was seven years old I used to dislike a girl very much she was about nine years old and used to bully me about she was a lot taller than I was, and she was a better fighter than me. She had black hair pulled back in a pony tail which was quite straggily. She had blue eyes which had a terifying look about them. She always wore summer dresses even when it was snowing. Her name was Bobby Jarvis (Roberta Jarvis).

Bobby always looked at me as if to say wait till I get you and she often did which didn't make me like her any better. But one day I plucked up courage and went to her house her mother asked me in but when I went in there was no seats or tables instead there was foam and thats where they sat after that I could not tell her mother because she had a belt and I new she must hit them instead I asked her if she was coming out but I new already. As I was going out their door Bobby was coming in. Two days later she started a fight because she thought that I had told her mother. About two years later they flitted and now the people who got their house couldn't be nicer.

This girl is not as skilled as the previous writer; we notice weaknesses in spelling and in sentence punctuation. This should not detract from our appreciation of the girl's sensitivity towards another child's life. Events exist not just as events but communicate what the writer has perceived about Bobby Jarvis.

The piece starts with an economical presentation of Bobby Jarvis. A few well-chosen details convey

to us the essence of Bobby as far as the writer was concerned and then we have the insightful comment on her summer clothes with its implications of poverty.

The second paragraph has a stronger narrative thrust. Perhaps the need to keep the narrative going creates problems for the writer and may have contributed to the breakdown in punctuation. As in some of the previous pieces the story line is subordinated to the child's expression of her awareness of certain aspects of the situation, here, the writer's awareness of another child. Precise details, like the foam furniture, convey insights most economically.

Although the writer shows weakness in sentence punctuation she generally handles the written sentence effectively. There is the neat use of the adjective clause in the first paragraph and the use of 'even when' which highlights Bobby's wearing of summer clothes.

The opening sentence in paragraph two is an interesting one. It is a sentence that would not appear in conversation and holds several meanings in an economical, yet clear, manner. Despite the absence of punctuation and the running together of sentences in the middle of the paragraph, the writer employs different forms of coordination, adjective and noun clauses, and clauses of time, manner and reason.

This piece of writing is nearer to speech than the others discussed in this section, with the exception of the first piece on morning (page 18), yet we can see how the need to communicate certain meanings draws on the child's latent knowledge of language.

The writer of 'My Secret Place' needs little response beyond encouragement although she might be interested in developing some of the possibilities in her story – her mother's approach to the corporation or the eventual fate of her hoard.

The writer of 'Bobby Jarvis' deserves praise for the insights displayed in her writing. What she wishes to express is inhibited to a certain degree by her weakness in punctuation and this should be tackled because the meaning is less accessible to the reader. (The section 3 on the conventions of writing discusses punctuation.)

7. Imposing Shape on Meaning

Time sequence

We have seen that most primary children use a sequence through time as the basic organising structure when they write. This meets the need of the recall of past events and story telling. A great deal of writing within environmental studies has to record processes in time and so this chronolog cal sequence is appropriate.

All children may not use this structure when they write. Here is a Primary 5 boy writing about a Sunday School visit to Largs.

Last year when I went to Larg's our minister and his wife and son. fell into the river and they got wet. and there was a man to rescue them. and When they got in the boat their son stood up in the boat. and that is how they fell in. They had to hire a taxi to get home. We got sweets and sandwiches. And cakes. then we got drinks of Koka cola. and the minister and wife and son got the flue.

The child needs help in handling sequence. The teacher may suggest that a reader might find it difficult to follow what was happening. The child might write a simple outline before embarking on the next piece. The use of punctuation is interesting. The periods actually appear at the end of each line in the child's writing; the child is confusing 'line' and 'sentence'. This is not uncommon with younger children but it is rare to find it persisting.

The three-part structure

Children find it difficult to leave things out when they write. A first stage towards the selection, and the rejection, of items, could come through the child becoming aware of a three-part shape into which what is being communicated can be put. This consists of a precipitating incident; the main incident; the outcome.

Even young children find it easy to do this. They start by considering the central incident and then indicate what led up to it and what followed is related to a drawing, a picture or a photograph. Work within the 'Foundations of Writing' project suggests that this is a shape that even Primary 1 children pick up quickly and that it stays with them. It produces a neat, rounded piece of writing and there is some evidence to suggest that it encourages even young children to consider motivation and consequence.

Primary 1

My pal was in a bad mood so he splashed me with a puddle. He giggled when the water hit my face.

When I was going home from school I tripped over a brick and bumped my head. It felt funny. I ran to my mum in the garden. She took me in and rubbed Savlon on my head.

Primary 2

On one summery day Sam asked his dad to put the tent up in the garden. They all helped because it was too hard for dad. That night they had a terrible adventure. Children were pulling and tugging at the tent. They let Sam's dog, Barky, off the lead because they wanted it to run away, but Barky did not. He just stayed there and growled and growled. The high school boys ran away frightened.

Logical – not chronological – structures

Because children normally organise their writing as a series of events in time they may find it difficult to impose shape on static things, e.g. the description of a place, person or object. Here a Primary 6 child was asked to communicate to others what he had seen in a picture of an urban scene.

In this putcher ther is a block of flat's a high chimney and a work a telaphone pole and an old block of high houses a dump with mud and wood a peise of metel and cane's ans some brick's and a top of a roof.

This child has no idea how to organise the communication of a picture of an area near his school. He does not have a repertoire of shapes, based on criteria other than time sequence, into which he can put the items he has to communicate. The teacher's responses may help him organise his perceptions more meaningfully, e.g. thematically – starting with a statement of what the picture is about; focal point – starting with a prominent object; spatially – moving from background to foreground, etc.

These shapes are comparatively easy to learn and do much for the intelligibility of the child's writing.

Creative writing approaches often encouraged teachers to bombard the child with stimuli designed to encourage writing. Pre-writing activities, especially teacher/class discussion, were frequently extensive. Teachers were often disappointed at the writing which followed such activities and there is some evidence to suggest that they may be counter-productive in that they may overwhelm the less confident writer. Perhaps these activities were appropriate to one-off writing situations but they appear less necessary for children writing within contexts provided by themes or by a lively and interesting classroom. The teacher's role may be seen not as giving the child something to express but as helping him to express what he has found for himself and in forms that are satisfying to him and which meet the needs of the situation. The teacher operates, not as a sniffer-out of error, but as a fellow-writer, a master-writer who knows the 'tricks of the trade' and can share these 'tricks' with apprentice writers.

Some of the most difficult tricks to acquire lie in the shaping of what the child wishes to say. Through her own reading and writing the teacher has assimilated a number of ways of shaping material for communication through writing. The teacher may do this so spontaneously that she may not be aware of the limited number of shapes available to children who are not readers. Many children however, seem to have access only to an organisation based on time sequence. There are many occasions where such an organisation is appropriate but there may be others where the compulsion to tell the story in all its detail may inhibit the child's expression of other awarenesses and insights.

One aspect of the teacher's response to a child's writing is helping the child build up a repertoire of shapes through which what he wishes to express in writing may find a satisfying form. The basic shape is time sequence and this will persist through all stages. The teacher may encourage modifications of this shape – the three-part structure or the 'report' structure which is discussed in section 10. With older children the teacher may draw attention to shapes based on some logical organisation – spatial organisation, definition of function followed by a description of components, and so on. These help the child deal with non-narrative communications. The child may be helped to communicate the significances he finds in experiences through shapes which derive from the stance he adopts to the experiences – contrasts, anticipation, retrospection, spectator, movement between participant and

spectator. These shapes reflect the growing intellectual ability of the primary child, in particular the ability to decentre or disembed himself from the event being communicated.

It has to be realised that these shapes do not only impose order and meaning on past or imagined events. They provide the child with a way of responding to novel events. They help the child to see, to respond, to identify significances, to find meaning. The build up of this repertoire of shapes has a significance that extends well beyond the production of acceptable writing; it plays an important part in the child's ability to make sense of what he experiences, to learn from those experiences.

8. Imagination and reality

As the child grows older he will increase in his awareness of the otherness of other people. He will appreciate that in some ways they behave as he does but in other ways their behaviour will be different. It was suggested above that this ability to see an experience from a point of view other than one's own is part of that decentring or disembedding process through which children move. Here a Primary 2 girl writes about Guy Fawkes night from a point of view other than her own.

The old lady sat by her window and saw the fireworks display at the other end of the village. She felt sad because when she was a little girl one of her friends had a bad accident with a fireworks and was blind for the rest of her life. As she watched the rockets go wurly turly up into the sky she hoped that no one would get hurt with any of the fireworks.

This ability to find meaning in other lives may be put to use in subject areas like history or geography, or may enable the child to write sensitively about other human beings whom he encounters. However, when children are asked to write as if they were historical characters or people from other cultures it is rarely completely satisfying. The child may use the costumes and stage props of other cultures but it is almost impossible for children to enter the thought processes of people distanced from them in time and space.

Imagination feeds on knowledge and if a child is to write sympathetically about other lives he has to have some understanding of them; some points of contact should exist.

Get up in that crow's nest you big head or it will be thirty floggings for you and be quick about it or else. that is how the poor sailors long ago were treated but today as we know they are not come with me and I'll tell you more. It was 1492 and the ship was off course already the mean were being lashed and the other men were watching like crippled snails. The captain was giving out cruel orders and the sailors were getting grubby food. Suddently we were all getting rolled down to the stern and then to the other side there were sick all over the place and blood dripping her and there then the captain come in and said bubbles get up on that crow's nest and tell us whats happening, i i sir. Theres a storm coming from the west. Bring all the cargo in and pack it in saftdly Mr, neil i i sir. The waters coming in captain and we're sinking, we'll get the bucket and start puting it out whats hat your saying I said get the pails and start putting i out and clear er thats better fuzz potty get the flashing light and opererater computer and start signelling come on men speed it up unless you want to drown i i sir. Later there a ship theres a ship captain. Soon we were in the ship and safely in bed but that wasn't the last of it.

This was a piece of writing by a Primary 4 child on the theme of 'Discovery'. What was the teacher's purpose in setting this task? If it were to stimulate a piece of lively writing then she has succeeded; if it were to help the child appreciate the reality of these early voyages of discovery by writing as someone who participated in them then the writing task has not been tackled satisfactorily.

It is a lively piece from a girl who delights in writing. Her jotter testifies that she is willing to try anything but she lacks control and an awareness of the basic conventions. Above all, she tackles all writing tasks in the same way.

One's heart warms to the crew – of Bubbles, Fuzz Potty and their 'grubby food' – but 1492?

What is the teacher to do in response to the adventures of this motley crew?

The child's view of life on a Spanish (?) galleon is an amalgam of 'Mutiny on the Bounty', 'Treasure Island' and 'Carry on Up the Spanish Main'. The teacher's response might be to ask her to reflect on certain aspects of the voyage that relate to her own experience. Here we have voyagers setting out into the unknown – like astronauts? The ship is tiny, sail-driven, poorly provisioned and without the

navigational or communication equipment a modern sailor would take for granted. The crew is ignorant and superstitious. What do all these things mean for the lives of these men? Are there things there that the child could understand? She cannot enter the minds of 15th century sailors but perhaps she can identify common needs, fears and aspirations.

The child seems possessed of a vivid imagination but is she really imaginative? The details are seldom perceptive and are the common matter of comics, TV and films. She can write a rattling good yarn but could she discipline herself enough to inhabit another personality? What she seems to like doing is constructing a kind of drama round the interaction between characters. The sentence organisations are essentially those of speech and not only in dialogue exchanges. Passages of exposition are written like speech. The section beginning – 'that is how poor sailors long ago . . .' is written as a TV presenter might speak. Passages of narrative employ what are basically speech organisations – the familiar accretive sentence.

The child's disregard of punctuation interferes with the reader's understanding of the piece. This demands a long-term response and work over an extended period and away from the actual writing. The lack of speech marks is not too serious as it is usually obvious that someone is speaking. It would help the comprehensibility of the piece if she could be persuaded to give each speaker a new line. She avoids the problems posed by having to find a sentence organisation appropriate to writing and one that can carry complex meanings but she is storing up trouble for herself because dialogue of this liveliness will eventually demand precise punctuation.

This is lively writing which most teachers would be pleased to get but it is not an adequate response to the writing task. We get the language of hectic action but could this kind of language convey perception or introspection?

This child needs 'hard' information on which her imagination may feed. She might be encouraged to write from the point of view of one actor in her drama. That might direct her to different kinds of meanings and demand a more precise statement from her. She has to be wooed away from this dependence on a torrent of dialogue. Can all this be done without inhibiting her willingness to write?

The following piece was written by a Primary 7 boy in a village school in what had been a mining area. Children talked of their discoveries of fossils in a neighbouring coal bing. The teacher read from the 1842 Commission proceedings in which children, no older than those in this class, spoke of their work in the mines. The children listened to recordings of miners' songs.

Work in the Mines

There's darkness down in the mines, and lonely you feel frightened of Gas, and hungry, and very thirsty. It can be damp hot, and dust, you think the roof is going to fall on top of you, and accidents happening, and your weary. I carry a seven ton weight of coal in a basket, and standing in three feet high of water. I started working in the mine when I was six years old up until I was eleven years old. That is five years hard working in the mines carrying a seven stone ton weight of coal in a basket and standing in three feet high of water. You may feel you want to see your mother and father, and brother and sister. You should think of you being down in a dark mine for twelve hours and seeing no sun or having no fresh air it is terrible.

The writing lacks the brilliance of the previous piece and the historical detail is not always easily assimmilated into the child's account but this writing more obviously satisfies the demands of the task set by the teacher. The experiences of these young miners is more accessible to the writer than the experiences of the voyagers of 1492. Here imagination has the necessary information on which to feed.

If the first piece is discussed as a failure then failure does not lie in linguistic weakness; it lies in the writer's inability to engage with meanings which lie outside her own experience. The importance of a firm grounding in knowledge is obvious as is the need for teacher and child to identify points of entry into these imagined events if the child is to meet the demands of the task. The inhabiting of another personality demands a sensitivity and a sophistication beyond many children. Perhaps we make too much of the imaginative powers of children or perhaps we confuse imagination and fantasy. Too often in the imaginative pieces written to support historical themes, the heroes and heroines of the TV screen parade in unaccustomed garb.

9. Meaning and fantasy

Children are expected to project meanings from their own experiences into an unfamiliar context when they write fantasy. Here the child controls the data which is employed but effective fantasy relies not just

on the child's ability to create a non-real world but to give it depth by the incorporation of real data and by his maintenance of a coherence throughout.

In the following piece a Primary 5 boy writes a fairy story. Although there was considerable prewriting activity it was of a general kind and not specifically focussed on the writing task.

Fairy Land

One day a boy met a fairy at the bottom of his garden. The fairy granted the boy a wish. He could wish for anything he wanted so the boy asked if he could go to fairy land. In a minute he was at fairy land. He saw this big huge castle. All he could see was fairies. There were millions of fairies. The fairies said 'why are you here?' The little boy told them his story. The fairies said 'You can stay here for three days at the most.' One of the fairy's took the little boy to his room. Soon the first day went. Then the second day went past. On the third day the boy said 'Can't I stay for another day' but the fairy's said no. So in a minute the boy was back home but it was only a dream. When the little boy got up he told his dad and mum his dream.

It is likely that the task has little meaning for the child and that he finds little purpose in writing such a thing. Still he must have read or heard fairy stories and would have some idea as to the kind of world and the events they depict. The child gives us an uninvolved story which he keeps going until it can be brought to a conventional and not very satisfying end. The piece is well-enough handled in terms of competence but how might the child improve it?

The events are held at arm's length from us. Fairy land and its inhabitants are not visualised with any clarity and there is no explanation given for the various happenings.

Should the teacher decide that the child might try another version of this piece then he might start from the child's own experience and try to create this land and its inhabitants. How do they differ from human beings? What gives them this other-worldly quality? Appearance? Movement? Speech? Behaviour? How did the land differ from his own environment? Was it beautiful or menacing? Could he be more specific about where he was kept? Why was he not allowed to stay? Why would he want to stay?

The readers are not provided with sufficient information to make this story come alive for them. Perhaps the child might write short descriptions of the land and its inhabitants and then incorporate these in a revised version of this story.

In contrast a Primary 6 class in a Glasgow school was engaged in a language programme built round poetry and prose by West of Scotland writers. Its objectives were to increase the children's awareness of their own environment and to encourage them to express their own response to it.

One of the pieces read was by Alan Spence and concerns two children who visit the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow and are involved in a fantastic adventure. This gave rise to the following:

Cheryl and mark whent to the Kelvin Hall The whent on a lot of things and the last thing they went on was the rola costa they went up and down up and down When suddenly they saw that thay wher flying in one of the carages. They went higher than the big wheel and higher than the big swings when suddenly that went out of the two double doors. Everyone ran after them there was a helecopter foloing them telling them not to be frightened but cheryl and mark where having a grate time. When they looked down everything was so small thay flow over the supermarket and all the people come out and saw the blue and red cart with cheryl and mark inside. then a lot of police cars came after them everyone was waving and shouting. They flow over glasgow green and over St. Mark s primary school and all the people inside saw them and waved and all the sirens on the police cars wher going like mad. Cheryl and mark wher wondering wat was all the excitement about. then they landed in glasgow green al the police men came running after them and one policeman took them home Ther pictures wher in the paper and thay wher on the tely.

The writer, a boy, is in some respects perhaps less competent than our previous writer but the topic has caught his imagination. The strength of the piece does not lie in exotic detail but in the child's development of the initial idea. It is a lively piece of work and moves forward at a good pace. The details are well-chosen and there is an effective blend of the real and the fantastic. Although the child makes many minor errors his handling of the whole piece, including his effective and varied use of the sentence, is to be commended. The child stays away from the trite details of vampires and such horrors that children import from their reading and viewing and he provides a good close to the story, scorning the 'it was only a dream' ending that many children use.

The fantasy here lies in the initial incident; after that the child treats the event as if it were actually happening. It is this that gives the piece a coherence and an effectiveness that is lacking in the previous fantasy.

10. Thinking scientifically

How can we help children meet the demands of scientific writing? First we have to accept that writing scientifically is not a matter of jargon or technical terms and that the child need not write to a set formula or to a series of headings. This writing can develop quite naturally from the child's story-telling and recall of experience. We would suggest to the child that the meanings that readers are now interested in are less concerned with sensation or emotional response and more with precise physical description or the clear description of process. This in itself will give the writing a degree of objectivity. The main form of organisation can still be chronological as much of the writing will be concerned with observations over time or with the description of processes in time. Children might be helped to appreciate that readers would like to know what it is they are proposing to do and how they are going to set about this and that at the end they would like a clear statement of results, explanations, applications or further activities.

Science writing is not dependent on a special language: it is dependent on thinking scientifically; and curiosity, precise observation and a willingness to reflect on data would appear to be more essential than terminology or dependence on a formula for writing.

A Primary 2 girl explains how her class set about studying the wind. There is a clear statement of intention and purpose before a delightful return to a most typical comment.

Yesterday we made a wind banner to see which way the wind blew and when Mrs. Duncan gives us some compasses we will be able to see which way the wind goes and then we will be big.

This child's clear statement of purpose is to be encouraged in writing which records experiments and processes.

A Primary 3 class had been reading E. B. White's book, 'Charlotte's Web'. The teacher saw the children's interest in spiders as a starting point for scientific study.

Facts about spiders
A spider is useful because it kills flies.
A spider has eight legs.
A spider eats bugs.
A spider traps it's food with a sticky part of thread on it's web.
A spider makes it's web by making radial lines and then she would start criss-crossing it and then it would be wovin in Circles.
A spider deals with it's victims by posining it and then eating it.
A spider lays it's eggs in spring. It lays hundreds of eggs.

I have learned that a spider has eight legs and it likes a lot of insects like flies, bugs, sentipedes, and midgets. It uses sticky thread then it rolls it in a thread and knocks it out then it eats it's victim. The spider makes it's web from the out-side then works it's way in. A spider layes her eggs in Autumn and they hatch in spring. A spider lays a lot of eggs about more than two hundred.

In these pieces two children tackle communicating what they have learned about spiders. They cannot use chronological sequence yet they manage to hold together related facts so that what they have to say is clear. They tackle this problem in different ways. The first child uses the list form of organisation – a series of separate items. The second child organises by using 'three paragraphs', two of which have a time sequence. It is interesting how two young children who have had no explicit instruction in 'report' writing have adapted such writing shapes as they possess to communicate what they have learned about spiders.

After a period of heavy snow a Primary 2 class recorded their awareness of this in drawings and words. What follows is the second draft of the piece. The child made three changes from her original. She inserted the second sentence; changed an 'and' into 'when' and changed an ambiguous 'it' into 'a second snow ball'. All the changes had to do with clarification of her statement. Although not scientific

writing this child's precision, the ability to put items in an understandable sequence, to state purpose and to anticipate, would all seem to meet the demands of such writing.

On Saturday I will make a snowman in my garden. I will put my snowman between the three apple trees and the pear tree. It will have a carrot for a nose and stonse for the eyes and mouth. it is not difficult to make a snowman all I have to do is get a little snow ball made from snow and roll it on the grass. When it is ready I start another one. When the second snowball is ready I put it on top of the first one and then I have a snowman.

The organising shapes that the child might use to impose meaning on events would seem to be most accessible if they derived from the chronological sequence or if based on identifiable reader need. Adult categories and classifications may help the child organise his meanings effectively but they may also interfere with the child's 'natural' ways of organising them as in the following piece.

Our Water Supply
How our water is cleaned
We did an experiment to find out if we could clean our water.

What we use. Sand water soil muslin filter paper sieves strainers jars and salt.

What we did. we got five jars filled with tap water. and with each we put soil sand salt into make dirty water which is like the water before it comes out of our tap. We got five clean jars and we put muslin on one jar, filter paper on an other one and a sieve on one and the last one the strainer we poured water on to all the things.

What happened – we poured water into muslin but it came out dirty we poured it through the sieve but it came out dirty we poured it through the strainer but it came out dirty we poured it through the filter paper and it cameclear we discovered – that the thicker material made water clean.

Late news – the water that we left to settle turned out a bit cleaner than it was before.

Although this formula reminds the writer of the salient points to be recorded, we may feel that he is not completely at ease. There is obvious redundancy in the writing and the occasional lack of clarity. Perhaps formula writing may create difficulties of organisation for children and the modified chronological sequence that other children used in reporting on observations may be closer to the structure that children would use.

Here is an extract from a Primary 6 field notebook.

Even as we sit here writing we can hear the leaves rustling and the birds singing, the bees humming and the sound of the grass swaying in the cool breeze.

I went down to the tributary to take a sample of water and I noticed a moth sitting on a blade of grass. I tried to catch it but it fluttered away a short distance but at last I managed to catch it. The moth is a brown and white marly stiped colour with a darker brown underside. After looking at it closely we let it go.

Lorna then found something in the water. It was a caterpillar – surprise – as we never knew they could live under water. We had some difficulty getting the caterpillar as it was stuck to a lump of mud and would not come off so we had to bring the mud too. We were very glad as we did as we found lots of great things in the mud. The caterpillar was a very lovely colour of light green with a lighter green underneath.

In the mud we found a black water beetle which scurried to and fro around the jar and some tiny, tiny, tiny thin, little wormy things. They were white and jumped and twisted and turned like little acrobats. Some little white jelly things were poked out of the mud and we thought these were eggs.

Now a tiny little yellow worm has been found. It curls into a ball every time I touch it.

A most attractive piece of writing and the personality of a lively, curious and perceptive child shines through it – but is it scientific writing?

We cannot expect primary children to so decentre themselves that they can hold that objective stance which we regard as characteristic of science. A child takes in experiences and the way in which he expresses them must reflect his personality. If we hesitate before accepting this piece of writing as completely meeting the demands of scientific study we must identify the roots of this hesitation.

The child starts quite effectively, establishing what she is about. She then lists her finds and

observations. She is curious but it is not a curiosity that records precisely, seeks to identify and explain. It is that of a sensitive child alive to sounds, movements and unusual objects. Her descriptions are vivid but incomplete or selective. She omits important things – she looked closely at the moth but what did she observe apart from colour?

What response? The child is obviously observant and linguistically competent. One would suppose that she would respond to suggestions as to what are the kind of details that scientific observations requires. This is not formula writing; it is more a change of stance away from the recording of sensations to the recording of properties. As the child grows in maturity and writing skill the one voice that was heard in all her writing will begin to be replaced by a variety of voices suited to various purposes. The uniformity of a young child's writing will begin to be replaced by diversity and specialisation.

Another piece of observation

Nature

At our plot there is a small round tunnel. It is very low and dark. There are supports one on either side. Over the top of it droops dead grass and underneath there is dirty, black still water it is about 10 ins deep. and where it is fast flowing it is about 2 ins. all around it there are rocks in the fast flowing part there are tiny colourful pebbles some of which are very green which is caused by green slime there are a few weeds round the pebles in the still part there are things swimming up and down which looks like little black spiders. At first we thought we saw other little things which looked like midges but they turned out to be only shells of grass seeds and the litle spiders chased them and hid them. After that we found some lesser water boatmen. And huge water bettle about 1 ins long. We are not sure if these insect have the right names. Because we do not have the nature viewer. And somebody borrowed our magnifying class. when one of our team picked up one of the green slimy stones. she got a fright because on it was a tiny little worm. And it wriggled madly. So she dropped it.

This is a well-handled piece of observation and the child should be told so. The child has adapted the narrative structure for this report. After an efficient setting of the scene she describes the various items more or less as she would come across them in time.

Again the child assumes that we understand the purpose of all this – and so we would if we were the teacher or a classmate but the teacher should point out the necessity to 'place' this kind of writing for the benefit of readers. The report reads rather like a description within a narrative and some may feel that the language is sometimes not 'scientific'. The reason for this is the child's tendency to give a personal response rather than an objective one – 'dirty, black still water'; 'it wriggled madly'. This is acceptable as it would be too much to expect a child at this stage to abandon her natural response to experiences in favour of a more impersonal stance.

The piece is precise and well-structured and the child tries to give explanations where possible. This writing, while not observing the conventions of the scientific writing that children will meet in the secondary school, is nevertheless 'scientific' in the way the child approaches this task. Science is a way of relating to experience, of recording and interpreting that experience.

The writing is still personal but it does contain descriptions that are more precise than those of the first piece and there is some attempt to identify or classify and to find explanations. It is more 'scientific' than the previous piece.

Here a Primary 7 boy reports on an experiment carried out in class.

This test was to show all you eager shoppers the strongest bags. A strip from each bag 30 cms long was held by clips then tied to the bottom was a carton which was to be filled with 100 gramme weights. First came the Boots bag. The tension mounted as the carton began to be filled. After half a kg it was slightly stretched but it soon decided it had had enough and snapped after a so-so 1200 grammes. Next came the Littlewoods representative and looked to have snapped at 1kg but it had only slipped out of the clip. It was to have a re-run later on. Co-op's bag flew past the 1kg but suddenly snapped at the 1100 grammes mark. The next contestant, the Woolworth's bag came on the scene when the contest was really flaring up. It wasn't very strong and gently collapsed after a poor 800g. The Marks and Spencer bag, the favourite, incredibly died away after 800g. then the Littlwoods bag strolled up confidently for his re-run. He only needed to beat the record set by Boots of 1200g. In his unlucky slipping it had taken 1kg but in

the re-run used all the weights before crumbling with a large bang. It had taken an incredibly massive weight of 2 kg. So as they step up to receive their medals the crowds rise to their feet. A deserved win for Littlewoods and for less chance of dropping your shopping use Littlewoods bags.

Scientific? The child thinks like a scientist even if he chooses to write like a sports commentator. And 'chooses' is the appropriate word. One suspects that a boy of this ability would have little difficulty in writing in more conventional language if he had to.

The child states clearly what he intends to do and how he set about this. He describes accurately, if racily, the progress of the experiment, and gives a clear statement of his results.

Response? Perhaps to point out that while we appreciate his handling of this piece of writing there may be times when such an approach might not be considered appropriate by fastidious readers – or science teachers!

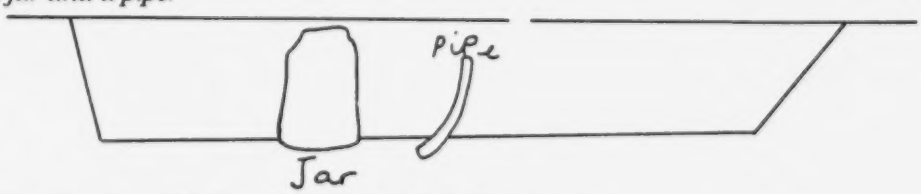
Work-card exercises

I hammered in the nails at the corner and put a bit of wood on and lentels too I bet it it vibrated most in the middle I think this is because it it more lose in the middle so it bounces most so I hamerd in to nails in the midle and it bounced most at the sides of the middle.

When I taped the tuning fork I quickly put it on the piece of polystyrene and between them they gave out a high sizzely sound. This is because the tuning fork is vibrating and it is making the polystyrene vibrate with it.

Here are two children writing a report on a science exercise carried out using work cards. The context within which these pieces were written has encouraged the children to neglect any mention of the point of their experiments. The teacher might point this out suggesting that such a statement might form the opening of any similar writing. Both children have stated what they did and offered sensible explanations. Perhaps the second piece scores through its more obvious separation of description and explanation into two well-constructed sentences using quite complicated structures. If a child can handle the structure – purpose, observation, interpretation – he will be moving to a clear and logical report. The teacher should point out to both children the effect that faulty punctuation and mis-spelling are having on the communication of meaning, e.g. 'lentels, lose, taped'.

I put the Jar in the water and emptyed the air out. Then put a pipe in the jar and Bloow the air into the Jar. I used a jar and a pipe.



The water went out when I bloow after that I let philip have a go.

This is not well-handled. Again there is no attempt to explain why this is being done and there is a weakness in sequence in that the apparatus being used appears, rather unnecessarily, in the third sentence. There is an absence of description of what actually happened, what the child would observe. There is no attempt at explanations or interpretation.

The ending is interesting. The child does not end where the experiment ends but goes on to what would be for him the next 'event'.

This boy really needs to repeat the experiment and to try a second draft of the report. The teacher will remind him that his readers will need to know why he is doing this and, as they were not there, that he will have to describe to them what happened.

The purpose of performing scientific experiments might be discussed with the class or the child's writing group – particularly the need for precise description, clear order, and the need to investigate why things happen.

Here is a piece of writing produced by a Primary 2 child after such a discussion.

Mrs. Macpherson had some ice cubes. We put the ice cubes in three tubs and we put the tubs in three different places. One was in Room 2 and one was on the radiator and one was outside, but the one that was outside did not melt because it was frosty. It was too frosty for the ice cubes to melt but all the others melted. The one on the radiator melted first because the radiator was so hot it made the ice cubes turn into water.

This is quite an effective handling of a science report by a child at the Primary 2 stage. There is some redundancy which seems to arise from the difficulty the child has in relating one aspect of the experiment to another. Notice that this child does not indicate the reasons for doing all this. Obviously some children find it difficult to conceive of readers who are not privy to what is going on.

A reading of the pieces used in this section demonstrates that this kind of writing demands the use of sentence structures that indicate causality to a greater extent than in story telling. The weakest pieces are characterised by imprecision or ambiguity in description and simple, time-linked, structures. Again remedy lies in developing the quality of the child's perceptions and his awareness of the relationships between events. It is not primarily a language problem.

11. Helping the able child

The weaknesses in the following pieces may be less obtrusive than in the previous ones but the competent pupil is no less entitled to the teacher's assistance than the less able one. There may be a tendency merely to applaud the work, since to help such a child is a difficult task, one that may stretch a teacher's sensitivity to the limit.

The Island
The island engulfed in long waving grass
Beckons the waters to come sliding up its sides.
The trees stretch their branches
In every direction
Long like fingertips scratching the air.
The secret of this little world
Is growing inside every twig and stone.
They seem to move with its excitement.
The breeze catches the conversation of two gulls
And carries it to the far end of the island.

This coolness is one of Nature's many ways
Of concealing secrets;
To tempt visitors into coming,
Yet never to let them find out.
Every island has a secret –
A mystery developing from Nature and Time.
But will man ever find it all out?
Let Nature and time decide that.
For we are not wise enough to know them.
When we shall be,
We'll be wise enough not to tell.

This is a Primary 6 girl – intelligent, sensitive and with highly-developed language skills. She was fortunate in her school. In some classes a girl of this ability might have been left to get on with her writing, being fed encouraging remarks and little else. In this class she was talked to, as even assured writers need to be, on matters of interpretation and technique.

The teacher can offer two things to such a child; one is the discussion of the meanings being explored in the writing. A good child needs someone to match himself against. The teacher should challenge what the child says, trying to disturb the equilibrium of his present stance so that new and more comprehensive meanings may emerge. Alternatively the teacher may help with matters of technique, introducing the child to 'tricks of the trade' that may help him towards a more satisfying form of expression. The teacher might ask this child to consider the last verse. It seems to have lost some of the intensity of the previous verse. In it the child has attempted to communicate her meanings

through images; in the last verse she has elected to make a more explicit, bald statement. The effect is that of prose and so the poem is weakened.

The teacher's relationship with such a child has to be one of equality – in fact, the teacher may have to accept that the child is the better writer. There can be no imposing of a 'correct' solution on such a piece of writing and, in fact, the child rejected the advice of the teacher and retained the last verse. Still, she merits the respect of being involved in a serious discussion of her work and not given anodyne words of praise.

Many children associate good writing with using 'good words'. This belief, which may be shared with their teachers, may lead to children producing dishonest writing where the words carry more emotional weight than the story can stand. It is difficult to deal with such over-writing as immature writers like playing around with words and this word-play is much admired by readers.

The water is like a gliding snake that plunges through the air with a hissing tone. Then it splashes like a torrent. It's like crystals crashing together. It thrashes like hordes of elephants tramping on old trees. It scatters like old leaves and swallows everything in its ways. It swerves from side to side in the air, and when the sun shines on it, it sparkles like cellophane. Under the moon it looks so pleasant as it glitters, but later it rushes and rumbles till it's tired again, and sleeps under the moonlight.

Here a Primary 7 boy is describing water coming from a tap; he had actually observed it for several minutes. This followed from a series of lessons on the use of objects, persons or actions. The result is impressive, but it is not good writing. None of the ideas in it is seriously developed. The similes are put down with such little regard for each other that the effect is self-cancelling. Many of the images are inappropriate while others strain after effect. The child doesn't really understand the simile; to him it is a playing around with words. The validity of the likenesses has been ignored. Perhaps the best response to this would be to ask the child to read this piece to other members of his writing group and justify his choice of images to them.

The cat softly pads his way to stalk a poor mouse. His eyes are evil and hypnotising. The small field mouse freezes. Its' legs are numb with fear. The ferocious cat wrigles slowly, cruelly, cunningly, moves towards his victim. Suddenly without any warning, the wily sly cat pounces! The petrified mouse is ripped by the cat's needly sharp talons. The victim runs about in cruel agony. That unmerciful leopard-like creature again pounces. The mouse is tortured, the cat rips, and tears the mouse excitedly. At last the terrible murder ends. Slowly, and slyly the evil beast with satisfaction in his glowing, torturing eyes creeps slowly home.

We can imagine the pride with which this Primary 6 boy would present his writing. It is a pity to criticise it but criticise it we must if we are to operate as teachers.

We may suggest that a cluster of adjectives and adverbs tend to lose their effect by over-stating the effect. It is the difference between eating one chocolate eclair and three chocolate eclairs. We may ask the child to consider if any of the adjectives or adverbs used really say the same as the others with which they are associated. If this is the case then perhaps some ought to go. We might ask if some of the images used are not too powerful for the situation, e.g. leopard-like? Most difficult of all we may have to ask the child to consider that this is a cat going about being a cat and, while this may bring no solace to the mouse, it may be inappropriate to use language which we might use to describe calculating human evil.

Major rewriting should not be necessary here. This is a phase that many young writers go through but they should be helped through it for it is easy for them to learn tricks which, if once applauded, become the manner in which they tackle all writing assignments. The models the teacher provides in the child's reading and the kind of writing of which the teacher approves should help the child move away from this over-emotional writing.

12. Correctness and hidden meaning

We went to Bunt ilend and the ganufol was leur. We went last Jon with the gras. The ganufol was leur we went on the moteu pes and we went on the Rodes and we got ou dineu and the milk. It tod us two olus to det leu we went on the pes. Me and my friend weur leu I met a friend wot lied don my pit. I went to the ganufol and go on the fraeni sosus with my freing I went don at the see and went in the woteur.

Such a piece of writing may make a teacher feel that she has to go right back to the beginning, to the

correspondence between this child's pronunciation of words, or his hearing of them, and his idiosyncratic – but curiously regular – spelling.

If we can force ourselves to ignore spelling for the moment other things begin to emerge.

We went to Burntisland and the carnival was there. We went last June with the class. The carnival was there. We went on the motor bus and we went on the rides and got our dinner and the milk.

It took us two hours to get there. We went on the bus.

Me and my friend were there. I met a friend who lived down my bit. I went to the carnival and got on the Flying Saucers with my friend. I went down at the sea and we went in the water.

For a Primary 4 pupil this child has a reasonable sense of what writing is about. This is a better account of a visit than the piece on a visit to Rothesay. The child has some sense of paragraphing – the piece divides into three quite acceptable paragraphs – a general account of the outing; the journey; what took place at Burntisland. The sentence sense is evident even though the child cannot punctuate in sentences. There is some idea of capitalization and the spelling, while most idiosyncratic, does contain certain regularities and the child can spell a few words containing minor difficulties.

The point being made is that this child could be dismissed as not being able to write but he can write. What he can't do is spell and that's a different matter.

A teacher's helpful response might be one which encouraged the child to persevere with his writing but stressed the unacceptable nature of the spelling. There is no way in which asking this child to write down the mis-spelled words a number of times would improve the spelling. This child needs a careful diagnosis of the spelling errors before being set on a long-term programme for the development of spelling skills. The nature of such a programme is discussed in the section on Spelling.

Summary

What we have seen from the pieces of writing examined above is that writing demands from us that we share meanings with our readers – awarenesses, responses, significances – which might not be stated so explicitly when we speak. The inexplicitness that may mar the writing of some children is dealt with, not by improving vocabulary, but by refining the meanings that the child is attempting to express. We have seen that as a child moves through school, developing in maturity and experience, the meanings that he finds in his experience will grow more subtle and complex and of more general application. Increasingly the meanings with which the child engages will be found outside his own experience. He will be concerned, not just with 'this is what happened to me', but with 'this is how things generally are.'

The expression of these meanings demands precision and clarity in the use of words; it also demands that clusters of meanings are held together in structures that enable deeper, synthesizing, meanings to emerge. Relationships, structures, coherence are important.

As the overlays of meaning build up in a child's writing, as he moves away from the self-centred recording of activities, structures which derive from speech cannot hold these more complex meanings neatly and economically. Other structures have to be employed.

SECTION 3

The Conventions: Sentences and Structures

Our discussion of how meanings may be expressed and communicated through words and sentences leads us to consider what are normally called the conventions of writing. Before we examine the teaching of aspects of writing such as sentence structure, punctuation and spelling we discuss a number of general points relating to the conventions of writing.

1. Teachers' attitudes to teaching the conventions

For several years there has been considerable controversy over the attitude that teachers should adopt to children's observance of the conventions of writing. Not so long ago the correctness of a piece of writing would have been one of its most important attributes: more recently one of the ways in which creative writing approaches were distorted was through statements like 'Spelling doesn't matter'. Such statements were unacceptable to many teachers and gave offence to parents and employers but few people would have quarrelled with the intention behind this statement which was that there are times when an overprecise concern with matters of correctness may prove inhibiting to a child who needs to be motivated to write or who is having difficulty in expressing himself effectively. Equally, there are few adults who would deny that in the long run a child's worth as a writer has to be judged by the quality of what he writes and that correctness must be seen as subordinate to this. A teacher may make a professional judgement to ignore correctness – for the moment – in order to concentrate on other aspects of writing. Perhaps schools have been too ready to accommodate the criticisms of parents and others who do not appreciate that because a teacher chooses not to cover a child's writing in red ink, this does not mean that she is not working for correctness by other, and more effective, means.

Teachers tend now to display a greater tolerance towards error. In language work, most would rejoice in the freshness, sensitivity and honesty of what children express and would accept more readily any accompanying errors. Despite this shift in emphasis, however, there has been little serious examination of the worth of the many practices through which teachers strive to develop language competence. The result is a kind of hybrid language programme where children may move from creative or thematically organised language activities to completing sentences, working on lists, filling in blanks, and so on. There seems to be a confusion of objectives here or a lack of confidence in creative approaches. 'Hand In Your Writing' (page 15) examined such practices and stressed how limited in value most text-book exercises were.

What is the teacher who values correctness to do? She may feel uncertain, guilty even, about making the remedying of error part of her response to a child's writing. The 'experts' are quick to remind her of the dangers in this. It is understandable that she should see the remedying of error as something divorced from her response to a child's writing and should persist with the familiar text-book exercises even although there is a wide-spread agreement that these are time-consuming and have little carry-over into writing. One of the purposes of this document is to look at the development of formal skills within the context of the teacher's response to the content of a child's writing.

2. The division between 'content' and 'conventions'

A division is sometimes made between the child's communication of meaning and his mastery of those language forms that make this meaning available to others. It is as if there were on one side a number of items, the content of the piece, which hold the child's meaning, and on the other certain formal elements, the conventions, which depend upon certain public expectations of correctness and which exist independently of the content of the piece itself. We sometimes speak as if content and conventions can be separated but this is for the easier examination of teacher response. Such a separation does not exist. It is the argument of this document that sentence structure and punctuation depend on the complexity of the meanings that the child wishes to express, particularly meanings that reflect the child's

movement from a teller of simple narratives to an interpreter of human actions.

It is further argued that many faults in sentence structure have their origins in the persistence into writing of certain speech ways of organising meaning. It will also be suggested that the mastering of spelling reflects a wider awareness of the word than the ability to spell a number of words in isolation.

It is hoped that this identification of a relationship between sentence structure, punctuation and meaning and between spelling and a wider awareness of the word will help teachers make a more coherent response to a child's writing and help heal the breach between content and conventions.

3. The significance of the conventions in writing

Conventions are the rules of the game. We do not apply the rules of one game to another game, the rules of soccer do not govern tennis. The way in which a child employs the conventions, particularly those relating to sentence structure and punctuation, reflects the meanings he wishes to convey. A child wishing to tell a simple story may employ a different set of conventions from a child interpreting the data from a science observation. The conventions are best examined within the context in which they are used. Readers will expect the writer to employ the appropriate conventions and, if he does not, communication may be difficult.

Mastery of the conventions helps the child to write more easily. If the 'secretarial' writing skills, like handwriting, spelling and punctuation, can become automatic, the more easily will the child be able to concentrate on what he is trying to say. Such a mastery also helps the child at a deeper level in that his command of sentence structures and punctuation helps him to organise more and more complex meanings and by doing so to find further meanings in his experiences. The creative aspects of writing, the finding and expression of meaning which may not have existed for the writer before he wrote, depend on the writer being free of the demands of these 'secretarial' skills in writing – either because a teacher says: 'These things do not matter at present' or because the child has mastery over these skills. The first approach is acceptable if the child is writing for himself or an indulgent audience. The second approach will win his work wider acceptance and it will also help the child bring together in his writing various items in such a way that more complex meanings emerge. **Conventions exist as much for the benefit of the writer as for the audience.**

Children should appreciate that language changes. A study of how certain words have changed their meanings over several centuries, or even within the life-span of a family, can be an interesting topic for children to pursue. Of course, what is acceptable in language usage changes also. Radio, television, cinema and popular newspapers have become the providers of the criteria from which language conventions derive. These criteria are much closer now to those that obtain in conversational speech and many of the distinctions between different language usages which once were observed are now ignored. Teachers may lament this and may spend time and effort getting children to differentiate between the usages of: I/me; who/whom; can/may; will/shall – and so on. No matter what authorities, linguistic, grammatical or conventional, the teacher may quote, children will not easily observe such distinctions if they are not found in speech. The teacher may lament what she sees as the erosion of precise differentiations in speech but she may have to ask herself if, in seeking to preserve such things, she is not fighting a battle that is already lost. **If children demonstrate grave weaknesses in their writing it may be a luxury to struggle to achieve levels of precision that are ignored by those whose language is seen as serving as a model for others – and these may include the teacher herself.**

This may be a hard decision for a teacher who sees herself as a custodian of certain values but in matters of language-usage the school is out-gunned by other agencies that influence the child. After all, a convention is no more than an 'established usage' and need obey no rules.

What should cause the teacher more concern is the intrusion into writing of forms of organisation more appropriate to speech. It will be argued later that colloquial speech may organise meanings in a way that differs from that used in writing and these speech organisations may not easily permit the articulation of certain complex or subtle relationships. **Because of the close relationship between the child's cognitive functioning and the language of writing any limitations on the child's access to this language may even have a serious effect on the child's ability to think logically. The teacher should concern herself more with this than with mispronunciations or minor lapses in grammar.**

Children may have to consider the difficulty presented by non-standard forms like 'I seen'; 'I done'; 'I've went' – and so on. The teacher may categorise such forms as 'ungrammatical'. Now 'grammar' is a

description of the rules that operate on a language and these 'ungrammatical' forms may represent the norm within the spoken language of the child's group. This being so it could be argued that these forms are grammatically 'correct' within the child's speech community. These are dialect, or more precisely, 'non-standard' forms. They are extremely difficult to eradicate as they are supported by the daily language of the child's group and standard forms of English may be seen as 'talking posh'.

Consider 'I was that hungry I could of ate all of they chips'.

It may be an impossible task to banish such forms completely from the child's language – after all they communicate meaning. It may be better to face up to the situation and to discuss with children how language is used within social groups (The SCOLA document: 'Scottish English – the language children bring to school' suggests a number of classroom activities in this area). Where such forms appear in a child's writing they might be identified by the symbol – 'n/s' = 'non-standard'. This will remind the child that while he may use such forms within his own group they will not be acceptable within a wider context, particularly in writing, and that he must entertain the possibility of communication being affected if he uses them. He will also have to accept that certain assessments of his linguistic ability, and of his social worth, may be made on this evidence.

If a teacher is to help a child communicate effectively in writing then the child has to recognise the tentative nature of the text. The child should appreciate the possibilities inherent in any text for alteration, revision, deletion and addition. To many children what they have written is something inert and they are reluctant to do further work on it. If a teacher's response to a child's script is to have any value then the child must be prepared to incorporate this response in his reworking of the script as well as in work to come. Where the conventions are concerned it is this co-operative working on the text which will bring it closer to acceptability and appropriateness because conventions represent agreement between writer and reader as to what is acceptable and appropriate. Discussion of a child's script is a kind of negotiation between teacher and child about how that which is meaningful to the child may be made meaningful for the teacher and other readers.

Conventions do matter. We do not suggest in this document that the teaching of such things as spelling and punctuation or any of the other conventions is immaterial nor that they can be picked up in the by-going. (It is remarkable how little attention even a fluent reader whose attention is on the story will pay to such things as spelling. Probably a child will be able to spell only about 4% of relatively unfamiliar words that he encounters in his reading. This is usually because the word has some special meaning for him and not because he is interested in its spelling.)

Nor would we suggest that systematic approaches to matters of convention should be postponed until the middle or later years of primary schooling. The child will bring with him to school an awareness of certain conventions in spoken language and these may, or may not, inhibit the mastery of writing conventions. As soon as the child begins to read he will begin to construct the conventions of written language – as he sees them. Children are active in language learning; they cannot help this. It is part of being human.

4. Teacher's response

Identifying weakness

It is comparatively easy for a teacher to point out to a child that a mistake has taken place and to give him the expected form. It is more difficult to decide why such a mistake occurred but unless this can be done there is no guarantee that the teacher's response will be helpful.

On page 31 the child writing of his visit to Burntisland spoke of going on the 'fraeni sosus' – 'flying saucers'.

It would be easy to point out the error and to set the child rewriting these words correctly but that may be to ignore why the child spelled these words in this way.

We may be interested in the confusion between 'r' and 'l'. Is this simply a mistake or is it a significant error? Incredibly the boy believed that he was going on a 'frying saucer'. This was the meaning the child had imposed on what he had heard so here we have an error related to a breakdown in understanding. It is not a spelling error.

The 'ae' in 'fraeni' comes from the child's feeling that there was something going on in the spelling at that point and so he applied one of the spelling rules he had. Unfortur ately, it was the wrong rule.

Error in this case came from

(i) a mistake in meaning;

(ii) the misapplication of a spelling rule.

Most of this information came from the boy himself during discussion of his work. It is at least arguable that the limited response of setting this child to learn how to spell 'flying saucers' would not cure his particular spelling problems. Precise diagnosis is required before remedial action can be taken.

Making a positive response

No matter how inaccurate a child's script may be there are always positive comments that a teacher can make about the child's use of the conventions.

When I went to Fores uwr rabit ranawae and wenwe got bac the rabit wosit there and it wiot in isst caech and it was black and (wut) whut.

One could say that half of the words in this piece are incorrectly spelled which is to say that half of the words are correctly spelled. Teachers tend to concentrate on error; a child may learn more if we concentrate on what he gets right. Our approach might be not: 'Let's see what you've got wrong' but 'Let's see what you've got right.'

The child has the 'wh' spelling in 'when' and 'whut', even making a conscious change from 'wut' to 'whut'. Starting from this the child should be able to deal with the spelling of 'wen'.

The child can spell 'black' which should lead to his spelling 'bac' correctly.

The mis-spelling of 'uwr' nevertheless indicates the child's recognition that some rule needs to be applied here. This mis-spelling could also be related to a 'sounding out the word' spelling strategy which can frequently be misleading.

There is consistency in the mis-spelling at 'awae' and 'caech' indicating the child's awareness of some rule operating here; perhaps the marker 'e' rule has been misapplied.

There is a sensible, if wrong, spelling of 'cage' with 'ch' for 'ge'.

The child's pronunciation of 'wasn't' might merit investigation.

There is much to build on in this piece of writing as there is in the following:

Today we went to assembly
'Mrs. Meldrum said good morning'
And some pepol went out it was there birthday

This child has got a great deal right. The child has some facility with speech marks. Rather than draw attention to the incorrect use of these the teacher might ask the child why he is using speech marks and then go on from that to asking the child to isolate what Mrs. Meldrum actually said. The teacher is actually asking the child to define the first rule of speech marks for himself.

The child has awareness of an intrusive 'o' in 'pepol'. The response of the teacher to this might not be: 'You've mis-spelled 'people' but rather, 'I see you know there is an "o" in "people" – I wonder if it's in the right place?'

There is invariably some aspect of a child's handling of conventions to which a teacher may respond in sympathetic terms. After all, it would appear sensible to build on what the child knows already rather than work continually into areas about which the child knows little. It is the difference between the child seeing error as a series of haphazard faults rather than seeing error as resulting from an incomplete understanding of the rules. As in all language work the teacher has to help a child develop a latent awareness of recurring patterns in language out of which certain rules to explain these patterns will emerge.

If the teacher wishes the child to build up these latent awarenesses about language then her response to the child's work must be reasonably precise. A general enthusiasm is not enough. There is little value in simply saying that something is 'good'. This may not tell the child what makes his piece good or what might make it better. The generalised condemnation of error is equally unhelpful. An examination of a child's writing jotter or folder may reveal teacher comments like: 'Spelling!' 'Your spelling must improve!' 'Spelling still poor!' and the final exasperated – 'How many times have I to tell you about your spelling?' Such comments are probably of more benefit to the writer than to the reader. If error is to be eradicated then the child must know the nature of the error and the techniques to be employed in getting rid of it. Simply to point out that error is occurring is of little help to most children.

Building on knowledge

Before the child comes to school he has deduced the rules that govern the production of language on the evidence of the talk he hears around him. Even when only 18 months or so the child who puts two or

three words together does so grammatically, that is, according to identifiable rules. Within a few moments' talk a child may have to make dozens of grammatical choices and he will get most of them right; just as in writing the inadequate writer may have much that is correct. The child can appreciate the fact that the spoken and written word are symbols and are related. The child knows how words are built up and he knows and uses the word order of the English sentence. He can handle singulars and plurals, tenses and moods in talking and writing. He can impose an overall shape on what he says and writes. He can show relationships through more and more complex structures, especially in writing. He has some idea that certain words, or tones of voice, would be inappropriate in certain circumstances. He can deduce something about social class or character from the way in which people speak and certain things about register from the way in which a book is written. Even in the infant class the child has some rudimentary idea that a story is different from a letter and both from instructions.

To say this is not to argue that a child's writing ability depends on speech skills and that the teacher should emphasise more talk before writing: it is to argue for the child's remarkable ability to handle language. Writing has its own conventions and these have to be taught.

When the child can do so much in language why does he seem to have so much trouble with spelling and punctuation which are, after all, quite simple things in comparison? No one taught him all those other things directly, yet primary and secondary schools will devote at least eleven years' attention to spelling and punctuation with only limited success.

The teaching of the conventions of writing is almost exclusively the concern of the school. This would suggest that schools, for all their preoccupation with correctness, have not yet found an effective way of teaching it. This seems extraordinary when one thinks of the hundreds of hours of spelling instructions to which the child will be exposed and the hundreds of pages of text-book exercises he will plod through.

Could it be that we are too concerned with the fact that error has occurred and less with understanding why it has occurred?

Could it be that preoccupation with error distracts attention from those strengths within children's language on which we could build?

The child as writer/reader

If we do not understand what is said to us we can ask questions of the speaker. We cannot usually ask questions of the writer. We have discussed on pages 14 and 29 how a lack of explicitness may lead to a breakdown in communication. The same may happen through a failure to observe the conventions. This being so one of the first things we have to do to improve a child's observance of the conventions is to train him to read his own writing as if he were a potential reader. Children don't always see their own mistakes. They don't always appreciate that those things that are in their minds but not on the page may not be understood by the reader. The child has to be taught to proof read, to stand back a bit from his writing and be his own critical reviewer. He may be considerably helped in this by having to work in a writing group whose members may represent a second line of proof reading and who may feed back to the child their understanding of what he wishes to communicate.

Every time somebody waked on it there was a squelching noise when the water had stopped my Big Brother was moping up my mum and Dads room and I was moping up the kitchen a week after The whole house smelling like cats my Dad lifted the Hall carpet the stair carpet . . .

Let us play the unhelpful reader who may seek clarification on the following points:

Were people waking or walking?
What is the 'it' on which so much was going on?
When did the squelching noise take place?
Has the writer read George Orwell's '1984'?
Was big brother cleaning up or feeling miserable?
Did he clean up a person – 'my mum' – and/or location?
Was the writer also miserable?
What took place a week later?
Was the writer's dad smelling of cats?
Was a large house, the Hall, also affected by flooding?

Certainly we can tease out the meaning but why should we have to tease out the meaning? Failure to

observe the conventions of spelling and punctuation has led to ambiguity and confusion.

A careful reading of his own work, focussed by feedback from other children in his writing group and with little intervention on the part of the teacher may help the child identify and remedy breakdowns in meaning or failures to observe the conventions of writing.

5. Meanings and sentences

When a teacher writes a comment on a child's script that says something about 'poor sentence structure' or even just 'sentences!' to what is the teacher referring? Is the sentence not communicating its embodied meanings, clearly, neatly and effectively? Is the sentence not playing its part in the overall structure of the piece. A sentence would be acceptable if it held together, clearly, neatly and effectively, those items that the child needs to bring together to convey his meanings. Also, since the written word lacks the face-to-face vivacity of speech we would expect the child's sentences to demonstrate sufficient variety to help engage and hold the interest of the reader.

The overlays of meaning that a child can bring to his recall of quite commonplace events may demand a sentence structure of considerable complexity. The sentence of writing has it; the sentence of conversation may not have it.

The sentence of writing has a hierarchical construction. 'Hierarchical' is used in the sense of 'capable of being classified in successive subordinate grades.' The sentence of writing usually will have a main statement or statements which may be qualified in various ways by subordinate statements which may in themselves be further qualified. This type of sentence is not widely used in conversational speech, although it may be spoken, especially by educated speakers and usually as an import from writing. An example of such a sentence might be:

Although I had never been to Rothesay before my visit with the school I had often heard Granny talk of the happy times that she and Grandpa had enjoyed when they had gone there as a young married couple just after Grandpa had come back from the war.

The hierarchical sentence allows writers to hold together those items that convey their meanings in such a way that the relationships amongst them are understandable by their readers and to do this with economy and some variety.

We have argued that the nature of the sentence organisations employed by the young writer will reflect the nature of the meanings he wishes to express and we have spoken as if helping a child handle more complex structures depended on helping him articulate his meanings more precisely. There is one difficulty, however.

The child will already organise his meanings in speech according to a different set of principles from those obtaining in writing. This does not mean that the child cannot master the sentences of writing; it simply means that the child, since conversation is the most common language form, is used to building up more complex statements of meaning in ways other than through the hierarchical sentence. Weaknesses in sentence structure in a child's writing may be due to the persistence in writing of speech forms for the organisation of meaning. This persistence can affect both sentence structure and punctuation in writing.

An extremely common form for the building up of more complex statements in speech is the process of accretion – various items of meaning may be simply linked together rather like a chain of sausages without their subordinate relationship being stated. The links between items may be quite basic – simple co-ordination – 'and' – or simple time links – 'and then'. This form of structure may reflect the improvisational nature of speech which lacks the reflective possibility of writing but it may also reflect the way in which immature or inexperienced minds organise meanings. Such speakers or writers may not appreciate those relationships between meanings that may find expression in the hierarchical sentence.

I went to the circus and I liked it I saw a space ship and I saw the beautiful lady and I saw the clowns I saw bat man and robin I went on the bus we were singing songs I saw a trapeze a woman was on the space ship and she was a trapeze the circus was good the circus was very good.

We can see few generalizing principles at work here, except in the conclusion, that would bring together related items of meaning. Even temporal sequence breaks down and there is little sense of audience. We

have to accept that this may be the way in which a certain type of mind, or a mind at a certain stage of its development, organises meanings.

Another way of organising meaning occurs frequently in colloquial speech. It suggests the primacy of the visual image and the tendency to build up structures by referring to the component items one by one. It can be illustrated by this well-known example from west of Scotland speech:

'See me. See ma maw. See fish. Ma maw disnae like fish.'

That this is not an outrageous parody is demonstrated by a comment overheard on a Glasgow bus:

'See this Christmas shopping. That shopping centre's murder, so it is.'

Again we have the visual cueing; again the breakdown into component parts and, most obviously, the absence of explicit meaning. What the speaker wishes to say is communicated by intonation and by dependence on the listener's awareness of the situation.

All teachers are familiar with the way in which children, and some adults, communicate their meanings by progressive focussing:

'See that book you gave me. The one about Florence Nightingale. The one with the red covers . . .'

It is difficult to find exact illustrations of this form of organisation in writing as it is peculiarly a speech form. What is important to appreciate is that this progressive focussing of meaning inhibits the expression of those generalising and subordinating principles on which the hierarchical sentence is built.

One of the effects of the 'liberalisation' of primary education may be that teachers, in a creditable attempt to build up rapport with children, may use colloquial forms of speech in the classroom. Transcripts of pupil/teacher dialogue indicate this, especially in individual or small-group working. While pursuing an acceptable aim the teacher may be surrendering too easily her role as a model for the language of writing. One of the ways in which children can develop an awareness of the sentences of writing is to 'talk writing', i.e. to use certain forms more common to writing when they talk or tell stories. It is important to stress that this is not the same as the exhortation to 'say it in a proper sentence' that was once common in primary classrooms. To encourage this practice the teacher may have to be somewhat fastidious in her own talking, not so much in pronunciation but in using words precisely and in articulating the relationship between ideas.

Another difficulty in the way of the child's using and punctuating the written sentence comes from the fact that children and adults, when speaking, tend to talk in 'paragraphs' and not sentences. These paragraphs are units of meaning, relating to one aspect of a topic, and bringing together all items relating to that aspect. The divisions between these units of meaning are marked in speech by intonational patterns. The persistence of this form of organisation into writing may result in seemingly poor sentence structures and rather haphazard punctuation. Such an organisation may be seen in the following piece of writing by a Primary 7 boy. The diagonal lines mark the units of meaning.

//At last I have a secret I can fly I don't believe you.// I flap my arms and slowly level the ground then I would be an invisible Bird.// I fly over trees and schools. And I would get bread off the people. And when it is rain I would not come out if it was rain. And I would like to be a teacher and be invisible and rob a bank and I would give you £10 and I would give my mum something for christmas and I would give my newph something of it. And I would give my teacher something.// Then one day I would be invisible one day.//

The first, conversational, section is the child introducing the topic as he would if talking to someone, including the response. The second 'paragraph' states the main theme – becoming an invisible bird. The third unit of meaning describes what the writer would do if he were a bird. The use of 'And' at the beginning of each 'sentence' gives a sense of continuity. If the piece is read aloud the full stops suggest pauses for breath rather than the end and beginning of units of meaning. The final section is the concluding, summing-up statement.

What all this means is that children who do not read a great deal, and who have not internalised the rules for the organisation of meanings in written sentences, may draw upon their deeper awarenesses of how meanings are organised and communicated through speech. This whole process is aggravated by the tendency of much speech to rely on single words or fragments of sentences for the conveying of meaning. The expectation is that listeners will contribute to the build-up of meaning through their own experience. How can a child learn how to write if we don't keep involving him with good writing?

A few years ago there was a remarkable upsurge in the use of the novels in primary classrooms. This is a practice that is less common today. Admittedly working with a novel takes time and may be felt to have no obvious outcome in a body of knowledge or skills. However, a child's close involvement with a well-written work of fiction is of considerable value in the child's personal and social maturing and

provides the most significant model for what writing can do and how one sets about doing it.

A similar argument could be made for the use of well-written non-fiction in the primary classroom. Such works are indeed common but the teacher rarely reads aloud from these texts. The hierarchical sentence can become significantly alive when it is imbued with its full intonational characteristics; thus underlining for the child the structure and purpose of this form of communication.

What should be the teacher's response to this boy? **The teacher should recognise that the problem is the persistence into writing of speech forms. The teacher should also appreciate why the mastery of the hierarchical sentence is important; it is not a matter of correctness or style but of giving a child control over forms that allow the build-up of the overlays of meaning.**

It is obvious that the teacher's response will be a long-term one. Opportunities should be taken during any discussion of a child's work to help him towards precision in the conveying of meaning. To save time such discussions of a child's work may be within a writing group, the members of which may contribute to the discussion. Even listening to the teacher's discussion of another child's work will help children develop their own awarenesses and criteria.

Here several Primary 1 children who have been at school for only a few weeks have made up a story that their teacher has written down. The story is the children's own but the teacher did encourage them to demonstrate their awareness of how one event related to another.

Trixie finds a lamb

Once there was a dog called Trixie and he belonged to a farmer called Henry. One day the farmer got into his tractor and went away down the lane with Trixie beside him. Trixie jumped out to see the sheep and he found a new born lamb sleeping under its mummy's tummy. Trixie ran quickly to the farmer. He barked and led the farmer to the lamb. Henry took the lamb and made sure it had a drink from its mummy.

Trixie took the rest of the sheep to some nice long green juicy grass. Henry lifted the lamb and took it to the barn to have a drink of milk from a bottle. The lamb sucked it up quickly and then went to sleep.

Soon Trixie came home because he was tired. He went to make sure the mummy sheep was looking after the lamb. Then he went for his dinner and went to sleep on the settee near the fire.

Although still dependent on co-ordination these children are using language in a way which is more common in writing than in talk. The teacher's response has encouraged children to indicate reasons and purpose as well as time links. The value to be derived from children working within a writing group can be seen here.

With children who need particular help in mastering the way in which written language organises itself the teacher may employ various activities designed to help the child compose sentences that hold several meanings together. In the SCOLA 'Foundations of Writing' Project, Primary 1 and Primary 2 children compose their stories by building them up using cards containing words or 'chunks' of language. This is not to get over the physical difficulties involved in writing as these children have been taught letter formation. Writing is an extremely abstract activity and little is done to make it more concrete for children. Children are expected to construct writing in their heads. Stories written on cards are literally manipulated by the child who can incorporate his own second thoughts or refinements or suggestions made by the teacher or by other members of his writing group. To do this through rewriting would be too time consuming for the child and he would not attempt it. Using composition with cards the child begins to see writing as capable of modification. The cards provide a useful meeting place for the child and the teacher. The teacher's response may encourage the child to change word order, to introduce additional information, to join relevant ideas together. Although used with young children this method could be used with older children who are having difficulty in mastering the hierarchical sentence. A comparison of the writing of Project chi[1]dren with that of children from a number of non-Project classes would suggest that where children and teachers have co-operated in composing stories using cards the resulting stories are closer to the writing model.

Here are several stories written by Primary 1 children during the second term. They have used word cards. Although short, these stories have the feel of writing.

Yesterday on my way home from the camp site I bought a stick of rock to eat by myself.

I climbed quickly into bed because my mum was going to smack me and I wanted to hide under the covers.

On Sunday I lifted the hamster carefully because my daddy was going to clean the hamster's cage out.

The use of cards allows children to use some of the potential implicit in writing – to hold meanings which then can be refined. Each of the above sentences holds together a number of meanings in a neat and acceptable way.

A variation of this approach which could be used with older children or children with learning difficulties is the 'word grid'. Stories are written on paper which has been ruled to form a series of boxes. One word is written in each box. Should a teacher feel that meaning is incomplete or confused in any section of the writing this is indicated on the grid. The child can cut out the unsatisfactory sections and proceed to redraft his writing as with word cards. Again this avoids the need to rewrite. The modified section of the story can then be reinserted.

Here are three stories by children in the early stages of Primary 2 which were composed using cards or word grids. The manipulation of the cards or boxes gives the child a sense of how the writing sentence is built up. This is an approach that works well within a writing group; children can work together to refine each other's stories or all children can listen in to the discussion between the teacher and one child in the group.

On Sunday at half past two Nicola and I were on our way to the Sunday School. A big lorry unfortunately was passing by. The driver was too busy peeping his horn at the boy on a bike in front of him. He never saw the puddle on the road and he went right through the big disgusting muddy puddle and soaked Nicola and me. I was terribly angry.

Yesterday Sally's Mum went to the toyshop and bought her an orange tent because it was her sixth birthday. Sally liked the tent. The next day Sally and Sam played with the tent in the front garden but later on lots of other children knocked down the tent and wasted it. Sally and Sam felt sad. Dad put it away because he had to get glue to fix the poles. He said that they might be able to play with it next summer. Sally and Sam felt happy now.

Yesterday jack went into Old Acres field to pick some buttercups to give to his Mum on Mother's Day. Suddenly some sheep came to Jack. They wanted the buttercups so he ran very fast because he was scared. After a while he peeked round the farm house to see the sheep but the sheep were eating their grass so Jack hid the buttercups behind his back. He walked across the field and out of the farm and went home. When he got home he gave the buttercups to his Mum. His Mum liked the buttercups and said, 'thank you', to Jack.

From the beginning of their experience of writing these Primary 2 children have been helped by their teachers' responses to make more of their experiences or imaginings available to their readers and to find organisations which will hold these various items, these meanings, together. The Primary 2 children have been taught how to set about expressing and communicating through writing. The cards and grid boxes provide an effective vehicle for the teacher's response to the child's first draft of his story.

Other writing groups have used their micro-computer in similar ways. A story is set up using a word-processing program such as EDWORD and then, with the teacher's help perhaps, the text is manipulated until a satisfactory outcome is achieved. (See Appendix 4).

We started this section by arguing that a teacher's response to a child's writing should help in the building up of those layers of meaning through which his or her experiences, responses and insights are expressed and made available to the reader. The child should be encouraged to move away from self-centred recording of actions.

As the children's writing begins to hold and express more complex meanings so they are faced with the need to organise these meanings in sentence structures which demonstrate the relationships between these meanings or express them in a powerful and economical way. We are now faced with the need to punctuate these sentences so that the communication of meaning is facilitated.

6. Punctuating for Meaning

We may distinguish two types of punctuation: one, which may be called functional, relates to the pauses and intonational patterns of speech and breaks the flow of written communication into meaningful segments. Functional punctuation would include items like period, colon, comma. The other form of punctuation may be called conventional and derives from the practices of printers. It would include items like the apostrophe and the punctuation of direct speech. We may distinguish another set of items which, while not properly punctuation marks, does help in the communication of meaning. These are features like italics, underlining, and the use of capitals to reflect the emphases, the urgencies, the stresses of speech.

Of the two main forms of punctuation – functional and conventional – it is the first that is most important in the communication of meaning. A reading of many of the pieces of writing in this document illustrates how ambiguity or misunderstanding can arise from the omission or misuse of full stops or commas. The incorrect use of speech marks or apostrophes seldom leads to misunderstanding although incorrect use may offend against the expectations of readers. Nominals and speech verbs (Mary said/he shouted, etc.) normally signal direct speech, while the actual content of direct speech differs to such an extent from the passages of narrative in which it is set that confusion seldom occurs. An examination of publishing practice demonstrates that printers may use forms of indicating direct speech which deviate somewhat from those forms taught in school. It is also a fact that direct speech is seldom used outside narrative writing.

Similarly with the apostrophe misunderstanding seldom occurs. The gross misuse of the apostrophe which can be seen in posters, advertisements, shop signs and even television captions indicates the dangers of the over-enthusiastic teaching of the form. The relative unimportance of conventional forms of punctuation in communicating meaning leads us to query if schools are justified in spending so much time in teaching them. They are relatively easy to teach, which may be one of their attractions. **However, when primary schools are faced with the difficult problems of helping children understand the functions and purposes of writing, assisting them in the finding and communicating of increasingly complex meanings, and developing skills and awarenesses that do not operate in speech then we may ask if they can afford the luxury of spending what is often a disproportionate amount of time in the mastery of forms that add little to the communication of meaning.**

When children begin to write, teachers are advised to use words like 'letter; word; sentence; capital; full stop' but without definition. If these words are used in conjunction with the items to which they refer then children begin to use these items with a degree of accuracy. These names can be used while a teacher reads over a child's work with him; the teacher will use the terms but eventually, the teacher will pause at the appropriate spot to allow the child to volunteer – 'We begin with a capital' or 'We put a full stop there.'

The child who has been trained to read his work aloud is more likely to give his piece its true intonational value and this is a help to the development of a sentence sense. The child who has been encouraged to allow other members of his writing group to read, and especially to read aloud, his work will quickly be informed that his punctuation needs more care.

There has been a certain amount of criticism of the practice of reading aloud, and certainly much reading around the class has little value and can be extremely boring, but where children are set to prepare writing for reading aloud, giving it its proper interpretation, then the discussion that will precede this reading helps children to understand the piece better and it sharpens their awareness of the relationship between intonational patterns, punctuation and meaning. There is much pleasure and value to be derived from individual or group oral presentation of a piece.

Where individual work is required tapes may be prepared of the teacher reading a passage with marked emphasis on the beginning and end of sentences. Children follow this reading on a prepared text noting the punctuation that accompanies the emphases. Then children may listen to a second passage on the tape, putting in the appropriate punctuation on an accompanying text. Finally the child may be given another text unsupported by the tape and is asked to fill in the omitted punctuation. The use of a listening centre would allow this work to be done with a group of children.

Most other forms of punctuation, functional and conventional, that a child has to master can be learned by discovery methods, provided a regular rule is observed.

The teacher presents the children with a text that exemplifies the punctuation item she wishes them to master but with the punctuation marks omitted. This could be punctuation of a list of similar items separated by commas, for example, or the use of the apostrophe. The children are asked to insert

what they think has been missed out and make up a rule to explain the way in which their punctuation is being used. They may do this within a group if desired. Once the rule is made up the teacher gives them a number of other examples of this punctuation item to see if their rule stands up. They are validating the rule. If the children claim that their rule is a valid one then they are given prepared passages to punctuate. Once they have done this their version can be compared with the original. If there is any discrepancy then children re-examine their rule.

Evidence from the classroom suggests that children enjoy this work. They are unlikely to fail, provided they are presented with material that asks them to take one step at a time. This means that in the punctuation of direct speech a number of steps are required, starting with the identification of those words that were actually spoken.

Children have a sense of learning something in such activities and what they learn will tend to stay with them as they have made up the rule for themselves. They are not parroting something they have been given by the teacher or the text book.

This kind of activity does not demand the teacher's presence to make it operate. The teacher is thus released for consultation with individuals or groups. Such discovery material should be part of the material provided in the writing area and pupils may be directed to it if they demonstrate a need for it. It should not be seen as a whole class activity.

The reason for using punctuation, the need to break what we write into meaningful segments so that what we write may be understood, should always be stressed. Punctuation should not be seen as the product of arbitrary rules that are to be applied but not necessarily understood.

Summary

In recent years, teachers have been uncertain about what their attitudes to 'correctness' should be. We argue that the development of formal skills should be dealt with in the context of the teacher's response to the content of a child's writing.

Although we often separate content and conventions for purposes of analysis, they do not exist independently. We argue that sentence structure and punctuation depend on the complexity of the meanings that the child wishes to convey.

Children – and teachers – should appreciate that conventions change. Teaching time should not be wasted in trying to preserve outmoded usages.

The teacher has to have a policy about 'non-standard' forms which are currently unacceptable in the written language.

Children have to be helped to recognise the tentative nature of a text in its initial draft.

The conventions have to be approached systematically from the early stages. The underlying causes of error have to be identified. Precise diagnosis is required before remedial action can be taken.

The teacher should always look for the positive features of a child's work, to build on the considerable knowledge about language that children already possess.

A most important element in helping children to write is understanding the difference of emphasis in organising language structures between speech and writing. This will help us to appreciate how children try to make use of the forms and structures of speech which are the dominant model in their own language experience. Reading aloud to children from good-quality fiction and non-fiction will help to provide useful models of written language. The teacher must help pupils to move towards mastery of the hierarchical sentence because of the close relationship between the child's cognitive functioning and the language of writing. Functional punctuation should be given priority over conventional punctuation. Teachers should always stress that we use punctuation to help ourselves and our readers understand what we write.

Section 4

The Conventions: Words and Spelling

1. Working and playing with words

If sentences are the structures which carry the child's meanings then words are the bricks within these structures. Part of any successful writing programme must be the development of the child's interest in words and a delight in the using of them. This does not mean that the teacher has to find time within an overloaded curriculum for vocabulary lessons. It asks that the teacher recognises that all subject areas will provide opportunities for discussing the way in which words are used within them. What the teacher should aim to provide is a word-rich climate within the classroom. In speech, the excitement of the communication may come through intonation, pace, gesture. The vivacity of written communications has to come from the vividness and even the unexpectedness of the words used. Written communications will demand a precision in words, subtle discriminations that speech may ignore because the listener in a conversation may become an actual participant in the communications or sharing of meaning in a way that is not possible in written communication. Work with words is not merely an aspect of creative language work; it is important within any area, such as environmental studies, where words have to be used with accuracy and precision. The teacher should demonstrate her own interest in words, a sense that words are curious, amusing, evocative, disturbing. The teacher should be seen as a reader, quoting or reading from books which give her pleasure, referring children to such books, making them available. The teacher should be seen to use words, sharing her writing with the children, referring to dictionary or thesaurus, directing children to them.

Success in language work depends on an attitude of mind on the part of the teacher more than it does on set lessons. This attitude derives from a recognition that words matter to children, as they matter to all human beings. We depend on words for the satisfaction of our simplest needs and the expression of our most profound emotions. There is a power in words that children recognise from abracadabra to Rumplestiltskin. To name is to control. If children seem uninterested in words it is because the traditional English lesson does little to arouse interest. Think of the language of the playground with its chants and game rhymes and its rich store of nicknames.

Such work with words helps the child master spelling. The ability to spell is not the ability to spell a number of individual words. All language skill derives from the steady build up of awareness of how language functions, of the patterns that occur within it and the rules that operate on it. If children pay attention to words, if they consider their component parts, see how they are built up, consider their derivations, understand their meanings and understand how words may be modified by the context within which they occur then they are being helped to master spelling.

2. Attitudes to spelling

Some teachers place too much importance on spelling and the child's inability to spell may lead such a teacher to make evaluations of the child's writing ability which are quite unjustified. Teachers may respond to a child's work in terms of the errors that are within it. The child's self-image, the degree of confidence he has, are important in spelling. Too many children accept too readily that they cannot spell. Such children lack the confidence to attack words or to apply rules. They are not motivated to pay attention to words because they believe they are hopeless at writing. They have been told this often.

In spelling, as in everything else, the child has to believe in the possibility of success; he has to believe that he is capable of improving. Only the teacher can give a child such a belief through her encouragement, through regular reports on his progress and through the child's active involvement in an organised and lively spelling programme.

If the spelling programmes adopted by a teacher are ineffective children will still tend to see failure as their fault. This is part of the trust that they place in teachers. It is up to the teacher to demonstrate to the child that she can produce improvement.

But what does the teacher do when the script is in front of her?

3. Which errors to tackle?

The teacher has to accept that it may not be possible to tackle all the spelling errors in one piece of work. The child may not learn if faced with too many learning tasks or with tasks that have similar features. It has been suggested that four to six words represent the maximun that a child might be expected to deal with at one time.

The teacher has to select those words the child is going to work on. This means that the teacher uses a set of symbols understood by the class. This could be a two-way system in that the child should be able to indicate certain things about his spelling.

The teacher would need to be able to indicate to the child words which will become part of the child's own spelling list. These are words which the child will learn to spell. There will be other mis-spellings which the child will simply look up in his dictionary and correct in a second draft but will not learn to spell at that time.

It is convenient for the child to be able to indicate to a teacher that he is not certain about the spelling of a certain word. This means that the child does not have to stop while composing to look up a dictionary or seek help from the teacher. A question mark beside a word would indicate to the teacher that the child recognised that he was not sure about that word. There is surely some difference between the child who spells incorrectly, believing he is correct, and the child who recognises that he is not sure of the spelling of a certain word.

What criteria should a teacher operate in deciding which words to set a child to learn?

Let us suppose a piece of writing contained the following mis-spellings: manouvre; peacable; waked (walked).

The most serious spelling error is 'waked' because this mis-spelling could lead to the reader misunderstanding the message of the piece. It also indicates a lack of awareness of an important rule of English spelling.

The next most serious mis-spelling is 'peacable/peaceable', because, while there is no interference with understanding, another rule of wide application is involved here. The least serious mis-spelling is 'manouvre/manoeuvre' because this is a word that the child will not use very often and the rule involved is of limited application.

Priority of response within two pieces of writing

My Dog Snoopy

Wonday two Boys came from The school and Knocd on the Door my Big sister anserd The Door and the boy figd my Big sister The leter from the school and my Big sister tookit and went up the starsh and gifd the leter to my Mum and and The adres on the leter was 75/14 finborn gardens and that was Mrs Meeks adres my adres was 75/15 finborn gardens but it was for a Mrs. Micliwd and my mum sed to my Big sister tell thos Boys to tack the leter and my Big sister went iwt on to the Landon and The Two Boys where diwn The Starsh by Big sister sad you Beter tack The Leter Back to school The Boy sad Why Becos the Leter is not for us so my Big sister forod it Diwn and the Boys tooek the lettre Back to school.

This girl's writing shows a number of spelling errors – too many for a teacher to attempt to deal with at one time. It has to be said however that there is a consistency in much of the mis-spelling which shows the mis-application of a rule and the child spells correctly some words that one might have thought would have given difficulty.

Which errors would a teacher select to deal with?

The first errors might relate to words that a child would be expected to use quite often.

The opening word 'Wǒnday'. This is a common opening with children and the teacher might wish to spend a little time on this. It is unlikely that there could be contamination from 'won', possibly more likely from 'Monday'. It is possible that the child is not thinking of the word as two words – 'one day'. If this is the case then this is not really a spelling error but one of meaning.

The child mis-spells 'said'. There is no consistency in this mis-spelling – 'sed/sad'. There is no group of similar words to which 'said' can relate as most common 'ai' words have a different pronunciation, e.g. 'aid/afraid'. However, this is an important enough word to merit teaching, possibly through the child's examination of a piece of writing containing examples of direct or indirect speech introduced by 'said'.

'knocd/anserd/gifd/forod (throwed)' – these are interesting words because they demonstrate

stages in the child's development. As such the teacher should not take up too much time treating them as serious errors. Another important group demonstrates the child's inability to handle double consonants as in 'adres/leter/beter'. This is a spelling of wide application and the child should work on this.

Another consistent error is the spelling of the 'ou' sound in 'down'. This appears as 'diwn/Micliwd/iwt'. The teacher could work from known words like 'town/brown/clown' or 'about/shout/scout'.

The only other spelling of wide application that appears in an incorrect form here is 'becos'. A group like 'saucer/cause/autumn/haunt' might be examined.

Other incorrect forms could be ignored at the moment as they are of more limited application and do not affect understanding. And indeed the above points are probably more than the teacher would want to deal with at once, but the teacher would certainly record the various kinds of errors being made, for later reference.

The darkness swirles around me when I swich of the light waves of light curle out and in of the dark I close my eyes a blank space in my mind the light of a car pasing by and the howle of the wind threw the locked door children scream and shout my brother put the light on and my sister is blured I see purple spots in front of me then cool soft light.

This is a much more sensitive piece of writing and the teacher would not wish to let the child think that observance of the conventions was more important than the precision of his recall of this experience. The mis-spelling is irritating but does not impede understanding, while the necessity to compensate for the lack of capitalisation and sentence punctuation does impede the easy flow of reading.
Which spelling should the teacher pay attention to?

There is one mis-spelling which could lead to misunderstanding – 'threw'. It might be worthwhile starting with this. This is probably best attacked through meaning.

Confusion between 'of/off' could also be tackled as a breakdown in meaning.

We can see the overgeneralisation of a rule in the intrusion of a final 'e' in 'curle/howle/swirles'.

Groups of similar words can be found for 'howle/swirles' – 'fowl/owl/bowl' and 'girls'. There are fewer possibilites for 'curl' so it might be better to establish the rule with 'howl/swirl' and extend it to other words like 'owl'.

The child does not incorporate the double consonant in 'pased' and 'blured'.

The first is an example of a simple rule – the doubling of l, f, s after a single vowel at the end of a short word – 'miss/toss/call/still' (except 'if/of').

The second is an example of a different rule – words ending in both a single vowel and a single consonant always double the last consonant before adding an ending beginning with a vowel. 'Stopped/swimmer/flatter'.

In this piece we have again different reasons for the incorrect spellings –

(a) a breakdown in meaning;
(b) the overgeneralisation of a very common rule;
(c) the failure to identify the rules relating to double consonants.

Criteria for selection of words for special study in spelling

(a) the word may occur within the child's everyday vocabulary or the child may have to write it frequently within school work;
(b) the mis-spelling affects understanding;
(c) the rule involved is of wide application;
(d) the child is attempting to extend or consolidate spelling rules;
(e) the critical element in the word can be grouped with others to facilitate learning.

A teacher should never feel guilty about ignoring certain errors for the moment. This is a thoroughly defensible and professional decision, if based on criteria like those stated above.

4. The immediate response

The teacher has selected those words from the child's script the spelling of which has to be learned. Where possible these words will be taught in a context. The purpose behind the teaching of spelling is to aid the communication of meaning and so the teacher will ensure that the child understands the meaning of the words with which he is working.

Whatever the teacher does in the teaching of spelling has to be done systematically so that the child understands what he is supposed to do and so that he builds on previous work. It has also to be done consistently so that there is a continuing development of the child's understanding of how English spelling operates.

When the child is set to learn the spelling of a particular word the teacher must show him a technique for doing this. If the teacher says: 'learn how to spell that word', and lets the child get on with it on his own he may adopt procedures that are ineffective. He may master the spelling for a short time only. The child may simply look at the word for a while saying it over to himself. He may repeat the alphabetic names of the letters. He may write out the word a number of times.

These activities may get him through the next spelling test but they may not transfer his awareness of the spelling of the word from his short-term to his long-term memory.

A number of more effective techniques and activities are presented in Appendix 3 'Learning About Words'.

Summary

The teaching of spelling should always be kept in perspective. Spelling is not a 'basic skill' in writing. It is always of secondary importance to the child's effective communication of something that is worth communicating. The basic skills in writing are always the composing skills, not the 'secretarial skills' of spelling and handwriting.

Yet, poor spelling can impede communication and the poor speller may have to pay a price, in reader-evaluation, out of all proportion to any detrimental effect that his spelling can have on written communication. In spelling incorrectly the child is ignoring the rules of the game, those conventions that make it easier for the reader to share in the meanings that the writer wishes to express.

Spelling can be improved if it is taught systematically and consistently by the teacher and if worked at persistently by the child. If the teacher believes that spelling is important then she will have have to do more than rely on a weekly diet of a handful of words culled from a commercial list.

Spelling has to be seen as part of a wider language skill – an awareness of how words carry meaning and of how these words are built up by letters and syllables according to certain rules. This knowledge need not be explicit but it must be there. Above all, it must be exercised by the child within continuous writing which, before being handed over to the teacher for her response, has been subjected to the informed scrutiny of the child and/or his writing group.

We have approached the teaching of conventions in a rather unusual way. Because the conventions are seen as ways of articulating and communicating meaning it has been necessary to move between content and sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling.

We believe that this approach makes sense of what goes on in writing instruction. The teacher helps the child towards the formulation of meanings of increasing complexity. This demands precision in the use of words and an easy mastery over words, including their spelling. Complex meanings demand mastery over the construction and punctuation of the sentences of writing. All of these arise from a generalised awareness of language and not from the possession of a repertoire of isolated skills that are seen only as producing correctness.

Appendix 1

Different Ways In Which Teachers May Respond To Children's Writing

The document deals with a variety of issues which teachers should consider when responding to children's writing. In this appendix we examine in some detail three particular ways in which this response may be carried through.

There is abundant evidence to suggest that the teacher's attitude to writing (and indeed to learning in general) is reflected in the children's perceptions of what writing is about and of how competent they are as writers. Children who ask despairingly 'Please Miss, how long has it got to be?' or 'Does it matter if I can't spell Edinburgh?' are merely reacting to a curricular experience in which stipulations about length and about spelling correctness have been perceived by the child as indicators of the teacher's criteria.

Such attitudes to writing may be conveyed in the context of the setting up of the writing task, but much more pertinently the child's perceptions of writing will be crucially influenced by his teacher's response to his own writing, and it is this matter that will be reviewed in this chapter.

Clearly the teacher's response must go far beyond the bald grade ('V.G.'), the bland comment ('interesting work'), and the exhortation ('watch your spelling!'). But before any written response can be formulated a teacher must read the child's work in the light of the task set and her expectations of the child. Her response at this stage need not be conveyed directly to the child, indeed it may be that on reading a child's script a teacher is made aware of shortcomings in her introduction to the writing task and thus she might take note of possible changes in her approach. However the teacher should also read a child's piece with certain questions in mind about the child as a writer: what follows is an attempt to record this process.

1. Interior monologue

A teacher, whose thoughts on a child's writing appear below, regularly serialises children's books within his class. The main activity arising from this is discussion of the book but a few significant passages may be used for close study and writing topics may be found within the book or in children's parallel experiences. The teacher does not construct large-scale projects on the book, believing that this destroys the impact of the book.

The girl who wrote the following piece had done well in her previous writing where she had got inside the character she was writing about and the teacher was expecting her to do well in this piece of writing, which arose from work on 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader' by C.S. Lewis.

What follows represents the teacher's first response which has not been modified in any way. If it seems long, it is because much of what he has had to write down would normally exist as momentary awarenesses.

Let's see – it's Jane now. She seems to have taken to this book. The last piece she did on life on 'The Dawn Treader' was good. Caught the right 'old salt' patter: 'hello me 'arties I be a sailor on 'The Dawn Treader'. A touch of the Robert Newtons. This living within the world of the book is certainly encouraging them to write. Reasonable length – seems to have found plenty to say. Read it over first to get the flavour of it.

What I Think About the Slave Trade. by Reepicheep

My name is Reepicheep and I want to tell you how much I hate the slave traders. The other day I was captured by the slave traders and was going to be sold. I chalenged them to a fight but they were to much of cowards to fight like men (or mice as the case may be). They took me to a sort of auction and I was sold to a young man who stayed to bid for other slaves from pug the leader of the slave traders it was a

horible feeling the sort you get if you were a dog being sold to a bad master. All but one of my friends had been sold but I was the first to go. Of course I would not let them capture us if I had a weapon with me but no-one had even a knife. Caspian the prince was sold to Bern one of his seven lords and Bern set him free. Then he went to Gumpas his suficiency who was governing the Lone Islands and dismissed him and told Bern that he was the new Govoner. Then he went to the auction and freed my friends and that is why I hate the slave trade well wouldent you I would even if I had not been through all that.

Well, that is disappointing. It's not bad but it's not really about what her character thinks of the slave trade. Jane has fallen into the old narrative trap again. Wonder if my specification of the task was explicit enough for her. I'm afraid of doing too much for them but I suppose we could have discussed more the kind of things that people might expect to read in such a piece of writing.

She was right to keep to the first-person conversational style; she couldn't have handled this more objectively. Pity there is so little that let's you feel you're actually participating in her experiences. Lacks depth.

The 'well wouldent you' comment in line 15 hints at the kind of 'real' voice that Jane found in the last piece. Had she written from inside the character with some suggestion of anger it would have been more effective.

Just do a quick check – hardly any words, adjective, adverbs, verbs, that convey Reepicheep's response to the situation in which she is. Well, that's the first thing I'll have to talk to her about. I think I'll suggest she tries a second draft – either rewriting in a more 'personal' voice or suggesting she concentrate on one incident to get away from the narrative. Possibly the auction; she seems interested in that. Jane's writing has a slight carry-over from talking. She still doesn't quite appreciate that in writing you have to tell your reader more than you would tell your listener in conversation. No immediate feedback in writing.

Let's see – are these specific points?

Line 1 – Who is Reepicheep?

Line 2 – 'the other day . . .' This needs more precise location in time/place. '. . . the slave traders . . .' Either general – 'slave traders' or some qualifying words.

Line 5 – 'a sort of auction . . .' A bit slip-shod. Be more specific, dear.

Line 5 – '. . . a young man . . ' Does he matter? If he does, tell us more!

Line 7 – 'a horrible feeling . . .' A rather well-worn phrase. Jane is expecting us to do the work for her.

Line 8 – Sentence beginning: 'all but one of my friends . . .' Surely the sequence is wrong?

Line 10 – From sentence beginning: 'Caspian the prince . . .' down to end of line 15. This section is definitely obscure. More information is needed and some of those pronouns will have to go! I'll put question marks in the margin indicating that I'd like to know more and I'll talk with her about this sense of audience. Might make a reasonable class lesson. Could read some of the more obscure parts from a number of pieces and get class to discuss their improvement.

Jane's sense of sentence organisation is generally good, especially near the beginning but begins to weaken a bit nearer the end. Probably the story taking over. Tightens up again for the last couple of lines. Line 3: The sentence beginning 'I chalenged them to a fight . . .' is a nice one. Jane can't quite handle the idiom. Difficult to get her to see what it should be. Sense is fine. Better just leave it alone just now.

In fact, all the sentences down to 'Caspian the prince . . .' on line 10 are well handled. Nice variety and the whole thing flows well. Well seen our Jane is a reader!

I like the way she expands on 'a horrible feeling' on line 7. Good use of metaphor and handles the 'if' construction well. Much more effective than 'like a dog being sold . . .'

I think I'll take back my comments on 'a horrible feeling'.

Good use of brackets on lines 4. Punctuation not quite right but I'll let that go.

Lack of capital at pug, line 6; seems a slip. Uses them elsewhere. Mild reminder. Should I bother about the absence of punctuation at the appositional phrase after pug? Sense is fine and it's quite a sophisticated point but she does use apposition again on line 12 after Bern. I'll come back to that when I see what else has to be tidied up.

Must get her to look at the sentence beginning 'it was a horible feeling . . .': lines 7 and 8. Sentence punctuation has broken down and there has to be some punctuation after 'feeling'. Try reading with

heavy emphasis. She should get it – quite a competent wee lass. Try for the comma after 'Of course . . .': line 9. She's competent enough to be able to handle punctuation in a list, after opening phrases, that kind of thing.

It's her willingness to go for more elaborate sentences that is getting her into trouble. Look at line 15. Surely she can see that 'well wouldent you' is not part of the narrative but is a comment to the readers and so demands some punctuation.

She'll have to have another go at the 'then' sentences on lines 11 to 13.

Good ending. Jane is showing an ability to be in the narrative and step out of it to comment. That's a growth point. Look at comments on 'cowards'; comments on absence of weapon; more generalised comment on attitude to slave trade at the end. She's coming on. She may not be accurate with her tenses in line 9 but she is using language to construct other possibilities.

Spelling sound but doesn't really get out of her depth. Trouble with double consonants. Teach her the rules; remind her of effect of spelling on pronunciation – look at words like 'surprised' and compare these with her spelling of 'dismised'. I think I'll put her on the appropriate part of the spelling list. Must see if spelling of 'to' on line 4 is a slip or indicates real confusion. If it does, let her make up her own rules from material giving examples of use of 'to' and 'too'. Just as well I prepared this!

Let's see what we recommend for young Jane: she'll have to think about her audience. She hasn't given them what the title would lead them to expect and some parts are rather obscure. This requires some measure of rewriting.

Language weaknesses are not serious. Some probably arise from the compulsion to keep a rather superficial narrative going. Most of them could be tackled within prepared remedial material.

Jane is going to be a good writer. She has a nice style and is at ease within the sentence. She is prepared to try quite sophisticated structures. I like the way in which she uses language to speculate about what might have been.

Mustn't frighten her off by being too critical . . .

Written on script:

There are some nice touches in this – I liked the bit about the auction – and you have the makings of a good writer BUT you'll have to think more about your readers. Are you telling them what they expect to get from your title and are you always clear enough?

Follow-up tasks:

Immediately on texts given out:

Jane to read lines against which there are question marks and to decide what it is in these lines that is not clear to her readers. Jane to rewrite from 'Caspian the prince; (line 11) to 'hate the slave trade' on line 16. Content not to be changed but she has to get rid of the 'thens' and most of the pronouns.

During free writing time:

Jane to write a piece – not more than one page long – on Reepicheep's attitude to the slavers. Piece to begin – 'I hate slavers!' said Reepicheep angrily. Emphasise not a story. Let reader feel Reepicheep's anger and disgust at what had happened.

Or: Write an account of the auction from Reepicheep's point of view – how did she feel, how did the crowd, the auctioneer behave?

Individual work using prepared materials: the use of 'to' and 'too'; spelling – double consonants.

This then has been an attempt to record a teacher's thinking processes as he considers a child's writing; writing of which he has particular knowledge and awareness in comparison with the child's previous work and of which he has certain hopes for future developments.

How exactly a teacher goes about this kind of initial response will depend on circumstances. What should perhaps be stated quite clearly is that there is no expectation that teachers will respond thus to every piece of writing which every child submits; but on the other hand professional judgements may be made which would encourage such an approach at appropriate times. The organisational issues implied here are considered in Appendix 2.

2. Written response

Within the 'Interior Monologue' there appears the comment which the teacher wrote on the child's script. The teacher has assumed the roles of the 'generalised audience' and the 'sympathetic critic': these will be accepted by the child because he will have been led to understand that writing must, potentially at least, be accessible to other readers who may not know him well. From time to time though, teachers may be able to use the opportunity of being genuine seekers after information in response to the child's writing. Children may write about interests, or holidays, or other experiences of which the teacher might be quite ignorant. The following example is taken directly from 'Hand In Your Writing', (page 52), but underlines these points very usefully:

A teacher taking over a class asked them to write about what they liked or disliked in their neighbourhood.

I like the red ash. I go there with my friends. We play football. In winter we play with our sledges.

As we have seen, this piece of writing is typical of many in the recall and communication of experience. It only makes sense for the reader if he already knows what the writer is writing about.

The teacher informed the class that he knew nothing about the neighbourhood and that he did not know what they were writing about. With each piece of writing he returned a slip of paper. This suggested ideas for a second draft. In the case of this boy the paper read: 'I don't know anything about the red ash. What is it? Tell me more about what you do there. Has anything exciting or interesting happened to you there?'

The teacher also distributed a news-sheet. Eventually it became a way of creating an audience for the class's writing. The first issue declared:

> When I first spoke to you I asked you to tell me some of the things that you liked or didn't like about the place where you lived. You didn't think that I wouldn't know anything about this place and so you just said you didn't like the red ash or that you liked the tunnels and I didn't know what you were talking about. Then I asked you to tell me more about one of the things that you liked or didn't like.
>
> Some of you told me interesting things about what you do.

Then followed examples that might act as models.

There were no specific instructions in writing between the two pieces of writing. This is the second version of 'The Red Ash' –

The red ash is somewhere me and my pals always play football. It has a big wall at one end and a big hill at the other. When it snows we all get bits of wood and slide down it right to the wall or we tie ropes on to it and pull it around. Last time I pulled it down the hill the rope snapped and I crashed into the wall and I hurt my head and it was a big lump and all the snow at the wall hit me when I skimmed into it. Sometimes I go up to the high flats for my pals and we play at snowball fights. Sometimes I got my pal on the head and when it goes hard we use it as a big slide and my big brother split his arm open.

Again the difference is quite obvious. All the teacher did was to share his assumptions about what he expected to read and made clearer the pupils' awareness of him as an audience. There was no specific teaching.

3. Teacher-pupil conference

Finally, we wish to examine at some length what seems to be the most natural form of teacher-pupil interaction in relation to writing, that is, the one-to-one situation in which the child reads his writing to his teacher and there follows a discussion about the writing; perhaps leading to a re-drafting stage, perhaps not.

A teacher who sits down beside a pupil and engages him in effective discussions about his writing seems to be making the following assumptions about writing, the writer, and the relationship between writer and teacher:

1. that writing is in essence an individualised activity;
2. that writing can be shared with a sympathetic audience;
3. that the writer's meaning may be open to interpretation by his audience.

Apart from finding time to carry out such conferences, teachers may feel that this is a fairly straightforward and easily implemented approach to the child's writing. Teachers find it easy to talk with children especially about matters arising within the classroom, **but what may not be so easy is to identify problems in the child's writing concerned with selection, with text organisation, with coherence;** and by the same token to praise successes and to suggest improvements in these same areas when development is apparent. Otherwise teachers can so readily find themselves commenting only on the surface features of spelling and sentence punctuation.

The following transcripts of teacher-pupil conferences point to a number of quite different features which the teacher wishes to discuss with the child. Apart from the particular points being made, it will be noticed that the teachers' comments and questions arise from genuine interest and shared pleasure in the child's writing.

1. In the following extract the teacher has noticed a problem of coherence in the text and has successfully drawn the child's attention to it:

Teacher: Could you read that sentence to me and the next sentence? There's quite a contrast here. Tell me how you're going to cope with that?

Mandy: (Reads) '*I froze. I just couldn't move one single muscle. I ran, I ran as I had never ran before.*' Oh! Uh-huh. She just sort of froze and then she suddenly wanted to run and get out of the place. She was that frightened she just froze to the spot and then she just ran as soon as she could.

Teacher: How did she do it? She was stuck, frozen. She couldn't move. Something must happen mustn't it?

Mandy: Uh-huh. She heard the . . . she heard the footsteps . . . so they realised she's stopped, so they stopped dead as well. And then she started to run because she thought 'there is somebody following me, I'm sure of it now.'

2. Steven's teacher was helping him to extend his rather brief piece of writing based on an incident in Ruth Manning's novel 'Green Smoke'. She was also trying to introduce the use of the relative pronoun 'which', but Steven was concerned only with the meaning conveyed by his story. The teacher realised that this was not the appropriate time to attempt to make this feature more explicit in his writing.

Steven: You could say – suddenly Susan got a fright because she heard a loud sneeze.

Teacher: Right. We'll come back to that idea of fright in a minute, but supposing you hear something today, you hear a loud explosion today, tell me how you would say that if it was yesterday. Yesterday I . . . heard . . . so I'll change that to 'heard'. Suddenly Susan heard a loud sneeze. Now let's get in that bit about giving her a fright – suddenly Susan heard a loud sneeze which . . .

Steven: She got a fright.

Teacher: Let's try and use that word 'which', because it's a very useful word for joining up ideas and sentences. Suddenly Susan heard a loud sneeze which . . .

Steven: . . . she got a fright.

Teacher: Would you say that? Let's write it down and see what you think of it when you write it. . . . which she got a fright. O.K. Read that back to me.

Steven: Suddenly Susan heard a loud sneeze which she got a fright . . . which had a fright?

Teacher: No . . . which she had a fright . . .?

Steven: It doesn't sound right.

Teacher: Suddenly she heard a loud sneeze which . . . we could get rid of the 'which', but that's quite useful. Any ideas? Suddenly Susan heard a loud sneeze . . . O.K. Let's get rid of the 'which' then. Will we just stick to, 'She got a fright?' O.K.

Of course Steven understands the functional use of 'which' as a relative pronoun: he can read and understand sentences including 'which', he can use it in his speech; perhaps he could have successfully completed six exercises on combining sentences using 'which'; but at this stage in his writing he was attending to the meaning, not to the structural features. These are features which he will have to become aware of, but, as his teacher has recognised as a result of this discussion, not at this stage.

3. At times the conference might move rather far from the child's text, and yet if the teacher is genuinely exploring the shared experience she is saying something quite important about the writing task and its outcome. Alastair's teacher was perhaps rather more affected by her blood test than was Alastair by his, but here she was trying to indicate how a rather more effective piece could be worked up.

Teacher: Did you know before you went for your blood test how awful it was going to be? So you're a bit of a lamb going to the slaughter. You're a bit of an innocent. You're going downstairs, and you don't know what's coming. You're tripping lightly down the stairs. What did they do to you . . .?

Alastair: Put a needle into my arm and put . . . and took my blood group and told me to hold it up.

Teacher: Yes, but what about when the blood was all oozing out into that bottle? It must have been horrible . . . absolutely devastated. They put this thing right through?

Alastair: Yes, right into a blood vein.

Teacher: And look, did they get your blood vein first time? They didn't get mine, they missed, the first two . . .

Alastair: Well, there were a few pricks, then they went in straight into it.

Teacher: They missed me, then they got into the vein, and then . . . and I was gazing at the ceiling trying not to look, but I couldn't help looking, and I looked down and there was my blood, the stuff that keeps me hot going into this bottle.

Alastair: I know . . .

4. The conference is also an occasion when the child's previous experience of his teacher's attitudes may arise with disarming honesty. Steven came back to his teacher with the two versions of his 'Green Smoke' piece. In comparing the two, his teacher had rather different criteria in mind than did Steven.

Teacher: Right. Which one's better do you think? Well, which one will we put up on the wall beside the big green dragon? (Steven points to one version) Why? I agree with you actually.

Steven: Because . . .

Teacher: It's longer, right. Anything else?

Steven: I think I could do a nice picture with it.

Teacher: Yes, I think you could. Can you think of any other reason why that one's better?

Steven: Because there are lots of adjectives.

Teacher: Yes, yes. Which one tells you more? That one, right, and I think that's what we were doing when we went over it. We were taking what you had written, and adding bits to it, and especially we were trying to make it clearer. Remember when you said, 'This is the story about a dragon. He had a cave in Cornwall, and one day a little girl was playing on the beach where they met each other', but if you look at this one you do explain – you explain how she was Susan playing on the beach . . .

Steven: That one was the best bit in the story, Susan was playing on the beach was the best.

Teacher: Do you see how you explained all this about how they met which you didn't put in that one? (Steven agrees)

Teacher: Tell me something. There is still something here that I don't think is very clear – suddenly Susan heard a loud sneeze. She got a fright. Lots of green smoke came out of the top of the cave and pepper and egg. Supposing somebody didn't know anything about green smoke, supposing they had never heard of it, what do you think would puzzle them about that? Lots of green smoke came out . . .

Steven: There should be a full stop.

Children, as well as teachers, may need help in setting the surface correctness of writing in perspective. Many teachers who have worked with writing groups, in which children share their drafts with one another, will have had to discourage the zealous proof readers in the group; although there is a stage when a sympathetic proof reader will be a useful workmate, especially if together the children have worked at the content of their scripts.

5. This example is very brief – no more than two minutes from the time the teacher begins to read the script – and yet the teacher has been able to select a point for development to help the child to the next stage in his writing.

Teacher: You've got, '. . . waiting in the room looking at the posters.' First of all, what was the poster?

Paul: 'You've got to visit your dentist, your regular dentist every six weeks'

Teacher: And what was the picture like?

Paul: It was one of the 'Mister Men'. Mr. Happy was lying down.

Teacher: With nice shiny teeth?

Paul: Uh-huh.

Teacher: Was that the only poster?

Paul: There was another one, 'Have a Happy Smile', and it was this crocodile with great big shiny teeth. There was a great big one had all different kinds on. Up on the top it had bad ones – Glee out of the Mister Men; he had yellow teeth, and down at the bottom Mr. Happy had big shiny teeth . . .

Appendix 2

Class Organisation And School Policy

Organisation in the Classroom

In the past, writing has characteristically been done by all children at the one time, in silence, with little teacher involvement. At the height of the creative writing movement, the teacher's input before writing began was more pointed and considered and feedback once writing had been completed was often more positive and individualised. However writing itself usually remained a whole class activity requiring minimal teacher intervention. Even in classrooms where more varied and flexible forms of organisation were used, writing was often seen as a conveniently 'self-fuelling' activity, allowing the teacher to work elsewhere in the classroom, with other groups doing other things. Writing was seen to pose no particular organisational problems or needs beyond the provision of pencil, paper and 'something to write about'.

This is not the case. If we are going to teach children to write rather than simply let them write; if we are going to engage with the child at the most productive point – when he is in the act of writing – then our classroom organisation will have to allow and encourage this to happen. Having evolved a pattern of class organisation which in the broadest sense 'works' it is understandably easy for a class teacher to cease to look at this pattern critically and accept it unthinkingly as a fact of life. Yet the pattern is only there to facilitate the translation of aims and objectives into practice. If these aims and objectives change and develop the form of organisation may have to change too.

This is a useful point for teachers to reflect on together, with reference to their own classroom situation. Questions to ask are – How does my present form of organisation help/hinder what I now want to do in the teaching of writing? In what ways could it be usefully altered?

Where a whole class is writing at the same time this, in itself, will create a number of problems. Whatever the teacher input is before writing starts it will inevitably tend to be over-directive and undifferentiated in terms of the needs of a broad range of pupils. Once pupils start writing the teacher can at best only scurry round, making brief encouraging comments or correcting superficial errors. And once writing is completed the teacher will have thirty or so scripts to which to respond.

Problems are eased somewhat in a class where groups of children are blocked into curricular areas, for a specified period of time. Here the teacher is in a position to make informed decisions about which groups she teaches and when. With a selected writing group she can focus discussion more accurately on the needs of the group and devote more time to conferences with individual children. A range of enrichment and appropriate remedial activities (or indeed starting points for further writing) can be provided for those children who complete a piece of writing.

Through time this can lead naturally to an integrated day form of organisation which can provide much greater flexibility and more frequent opportunities for working with individual children – particularly so if there are ongoing developing contexts which encourage and elicit voluntary writing. The possibilities and complexities of this way of working are touched on in the SCOLA publication – 'Mr. Togs the Tailor – a context for writing'.

Making Choices

Whatever form of organisation is used the teacher will have to make choices. Which pupils require a detailed response at this time? In which pieces of writing are the clearest growth points? Which pupils would benefit from being drawn together as a writing group? Which pupils require provision of remedial materials? Which pupils should I choose for an individual pupil/teacher conference? These choices will be made over a period of time on the basis of a careful reading of pupil scripts and a consideration of each child's overall progress.

The assessment grid contained in 'Hand In Your Writing' (page 23 and the Appendix), or a modified version of it, may be a useful tool in identifying the stage the child is at.

There will also have to be a realistic assessment of the amount of time that can be devoted to this

work. One way of beginning might be for several teachers to select a small number of pupils' scripts and begin responding to them in the ways suggested in this paper – all the time sharing and discussing difficulties and successes encountered.

No teacher can make a detailed, forward-looking response to every script received. To consider in depth a child's piece of writing in the manner of the interior monologue in pages 48–50 could take upwards of 10–15 minutes – particularly in the case of a teacher who is not used to working in this way. Indeed it could be argued that too often in the past, in attempting to respond to every child's script, no worthwhile response was made to any child. What should be aimed for is a pupil/teacher conference with every child in the class within an 8 week period. But some children may need a greater degree of attention than this if they are to move forward at all.

Finding Time

As teachers gain experience in the reading of pupil scripts they will come to perceive individual needs and growth points more quickly, but the examination of scripts can never be a brief exercise. However, there are practical steps any teacher can take to allow herself more effective teaching time. These steps are to do with (i) minimising pupil interruptions – most commonly to do with spelling correctness; (ii) encouraging a greater degree of independence and self-help through the formation of writing groups; (iii) providing a range of resources and support material – possibly within a writing area.

(i) **Spelling correctness**

When a teacher is being continually interrupted to provide correct spellings it is best to start by asking where such anxieties come from. The school? The teacher? The home? It is arguable that spelling should be a major concern for pupil and teacher only at the editing stage and that phonically consistent attempts should be acceptable before that. It is worth discussing this with the children themselves. Many able writers have been poor spellers!

One possible strategy is to encourage children to mark in some way (e.g. by underlining or inserting a question mark above) those words which they are uncertain of. This has the merit of not breaking the pupil's flow, defusing the pupil's anxiety about correctness at the point of writing and making him a more equal and interested participant in any later discussion about his spelling.

Clearly, the provision of spelling resources, such as word banks; dictionaries; lists of commonly mis-spelt words, words related to ongoing themes, mathematical words, etc., will help some children and ease some of the burden on the teacher. Such resources, however, will be of more help to the good speller than the poor one.

In a classroom where spelling is seen as a common, acceptable and shared difficulty children are more likely to seek help from each other as well as the teacher.

(ii) **Writing Groups**

It is not uncommon to hear children engaged in writing read a passage or line they particularly relish to a friend or neighbour. That's surely to be encouraged. It is only a small step from that natural act of sharing to the bringing together of groups of children with common purposes or problems.

At the start it may be easier if these writing groups are also friendship groups. To put down in writing what one thinks and feels and share it with others can make one vulnerable. The degree of vulnerability should not be underestimated. There has to be mutual trust and sensitivity. The teacher can help here. If she also writes and shares her writing with her pupils their stance towards her (and, we suspect, her stance towards them) will be very different. Apart from anything else it is both salutary and insightful for a teacher to attempt what she has asked her pupils to do.

Some ways of writing with children are more helpful than others. The quite common practice of a teacher using the contributions of individual pupils to make a 'whole class' poem is one of the least helpful. Although children are seeing text manipulated by a teacher who orchestrates and edits 'their' poem, the teacher is manipulating it as an arbiter rather than a contributor and the stance she has towards the text is very different from that of an individual writer. Far more helpful is for the teacher simply to make her own writing available to a writing group and discuss with them the difficulties in the task she has set herself and them. Children will also learn a great deal if a teacher is prepared to take them through the process of writing – writing publicly on the board; talking about the sources of ideas, images, the kinds of choices she is making, her ability to go back and alter previous lines in the light of new ideas and so on. Through this talk children can get at least a feeling for and understanding of the

writing task. Our impression is that many children never have this.

A writing group, once formed, may not function effectively. It may take time, patience and much talking before children feel confident in their new role. They should be encouraged to read their writing to each other; to listen appreciatively; to comment on what they enjoy and what they find difficult to understand; to expect explicitness and coherence in each other's work; to support each other in dealing with the conventions; to suggest possible or alternative lines of development in each other's work; to identify error in each other's scripts. (The last may be delayed. It should never become the dominant function.) You will note that what we ask of children is part of what we ask of teachers. Indeed if teachers do not respond in these ways themselves there is little likelihood of children doing so.

What then are the benefits of forming writing groups? The teacher's need to spend a great deal of time with each child should be lessened. The teacher should have access to a much more dynamic teaching situation – particularly if she is seen as a fellow-writer with shared problems. When talking to one child within the group other children will be listening and learning in the light of their own previous discussions. Through such talk pupils will develop criteria for assessing their own and others' writing. They will develop a much keener sense of audience. They will begin to see error in its true perspective as an inevitable and shared problem with which they can usually collectively cope.

(iii) **Writing Areas**

Inadequate resources which are poorly organised and not near the hand of the writer are worse than useless. At the least a writing area should centralise available resources. Resources should include:

(a) Individualised spelling support material;
(b) appropriate remedial material to which the child can be directed by the teacher – preferably programmed and self-correcting;
(c) material which encourages and extends children's interest in words and their delight in their use and reflects the current interest of the classroom;
(d) a wide variety of starting points for writing including pictures, slides, tapes. The quality and range of these are especially important if we wish children to become voluntary writers;
(e) regularly changed and carefully prepared and mounted displays of children's writing;
(f) material related to handwriting – correct letter formation, pencil grip, examples of decorative borders, etc.;
(g) listening centre; tape recorders for taping children's own stories; providing starting points for writing; helping with remedial work, e.g. punctuation;
(h) word processors, microwriters and printers will likely have a place here very shortly, if not in some schools already.

A writing area can be more than this. We already, as a matter of course, provide library corners in our classrooms which are comfortable and inviting because we recognise that the leisure reader has particular requirements. Similarly with the writer. A child writing is facing different problems, requiring different attitudes and working patterns from the same child doing number work. There is much to be said for underlining the distinctiveness of writing as an activity by physically defining the writing area; by creating an atmosphere within it which is conducive to the task. Too great a part of our pupils' working day is one-paced and undifferentiated, with a concomitant lack of involvement. Much practical advice on the definition and equipping of areas can be found in Joan Dean's 'Room to Learn' series. (See the Bibliography)

A School Policy

SCOLA, like many other bodies, has advocated the development of a school policy on the teaching of writing. However, we are aware of the difficulties. It is all too easy in such a policy statement to lapse into woolly generalities or abrupt statement of desired outcomes which are of little practical help to the classroom teacher. Whatever policy is produced should relate directly to the perceived needs of the school and be informed by the practical experiences of the class teachers. Often the most fruitful part of policy-making for teachers is the making itself. However, schools should not lose sight of their need to keep parents and others informed about new policies, e.g. changes in attitudes to the marking of scripts.

Towards a draft policy

One way of approaching the task would be to attack it on two fronts:

(i) **Management team in consultation with staff**

- analyse current school situation and agree on priorities
- attempt to identify developmental stages in writing in terms of stances and teaching objectives
- through examination of pupil scripts explore and articulate the meaning of the terms selection, explicitness and coherence in writing and attempt to reach an understanding of the difficulties pupils face in these areas
- clarify beyond doubt which conventions are to be taught and when
- provide guidance to teachers on the identification of significant error
- through examination of pupil scripts identify common errors within the school and prepare and organise appropriate remedial material to deal with these
- advocate and exemplify an acceptable whole school marking symbol system
- establish those aspects of policy where consistency of practice is important and where inconsistency would make each teacher's work and each pupil's learning more difficult
- establish a pattern for the keeping of records of each child's progress (perhaps in the form of profiles and work undertaken by the teachers)
- establish a pattern for dissemination of information about the school policy and its outcomes to parents.

(ii) **Groups of class teachers working together**

- select small number of pupils and begin to discuss collectively their scripts and respond to them in the ways suggested in this document
- make a start on using a drafting/re-drafting approach and discuss the difficulties/successes encountered
- set up writing groups; set up writing areas
- begin to have individual pupil/teacher conferences; tape these and discuss them with each other
- list productive starting points for writing (note what 'Hand In Your Writing' has to say about the importance of the child's own experiences and the need for focus) and exchange these.

We would reckon that using this approach the production of even a draft policy would take more than a year. The process, however, would be a genuine learning one for all involved and the resulting policy would be informed by the practical experience of teachers.

APPENDIX 3

Learning About Words

Some general points about spelling

(a) When a child asks the teacher for the spelling of a word the teacher should write it out for him wherever possible; at later stages it may be appropriate to provide the spoken alphabetic spelling.

(b) When a teacher writes out a word for a child he should copy it down from his visual memory, checking against the teacher's version. Similarly, the child should attempt to visualise the words he has taken from the dictionary.

(c) If a child corrects an error in spelling while writing, the teacher should encourage him to write out the whole word again and not simply to change the letters mis-spelled. By changing individual letters the child may get a distorted view of the structure of the word.

(d) Many teachers discussing a spelling with a child may ask the child to sound it out but this is of limited value. The sound values of letters or groups of letters may not be constant; these may depend on the immediate context within which these letters appear.

Would sounding out help with words like 'tough/plough/dough/freight/weight'?

(e) Teachers may ask children to give words their syllabic value. This may be of some value because it gives children an awareness of how words are built up.

The child may realise that all words or syllables must contain a vowel sound. He may appreciate that certain syllables, prefixes and suffixes, may change the meaning of the words. He may begin to realise that certain letters or groups of letters tend to follow others. He may begin to realise that certain endings may indicate the nature of a word, e.g. 'ance' is associated with nouns as in 'importance/appearance/entrance.' The examination of nonsense words and their subsequent invention may sharpen this knowledge. He may realise how morphological features can indicate both the part of speech of a word and grammatical features like tense or number.

His examination of syllables may lead the child to realise that there are certain combinations of letters that do not occur in English.

To sup borsch in a Porsche is a most un-English thing to do.

(f) The more a child understands about how words are built up the better he will spell. The child has to internalise patterns and structures rather than discrete elements that appear in individual words and the teacher's discussion of words should help develop this awareness.

Learning to spell

We have said that spelling using the names or sounds of individual letters may not be very effective. Although spelling can involve all the senses what is important is the primacy of sight over the others.

One technique that teachers might give to children learning how to spell is – look; cover; write; check.

(i) Look – at the word in its context
(ii) Say – the word silently
(iii) Think – of the meaning
(iv) Cover – try to see the word
(v) Uncover – to see if correct image
(vi) Cover – again and visualise
(vii) Write – the word
(viii) Check – writing against original word
(ix) If not correct, repeat (i) – (viii)

The sight process can be augmented by introductory discussion of the meaning of the word and by the deliberate pronunciation of the word as the child writes down the word or as he traces it with his finger.

This process gives the child the meaning of the word, its sound, its syllabic structure, its visual shape and its kinaesthetic shape.

Above all, the child is involved actively in learning the spelling of this word.

The autonomous learner

One aim in the teaching of spelling is to produce children who are, as far as possible, autonomous learners.

The child should take responsibility for his own spelling – carefully proof-reading his work and exchanging his script with other members of the writing group for mutual criticism. He should learn words picked out by the teacher using the procedures described above. He should add such words to his word-list or word-bank. He should group, by sight and not by sound, recurring clusters of letters (or letter strings) e.g. 'one'; words like 'bone/gone/done'. These collections can be kept in word boxes labelled appropriately. As suggested above, he can collect interesting or curious words. He can find out about the history of words. He can make up words to describe characters or objects – even invented words should still embody acceptable spelling.

Word lists

The teacher may have to consider whether or not the child's ongoing work in spelling is related to word-lists. Many experts frown on the use of commercial or teacher-compiled word-lists. They say that the words should come from the child's own writing. There is a body of opinion which says that teacher-selected lists may be more effective with young or less-able children who may employ only a limited range of words or have such a random approach to spelling that certain basic awarenesses have to be developed.

What seems to be important is that what the child is set to learn represents words that he needs to know or wants to know how to spell; that wherever possible such words are taught in a context and that the teacher operates priorities in selecting words which help the child communicate his meaning or which introduce him to spelling rules of wide application.

The relating of new awarenesses to past understandings is always important in selecting words for study and discussion.

The diagnostic testing of spelling

It is important that spelling is tested at regular intervals. Even competent spellers should be included in such tests as the extension of their vocabulary range may involve them in spelling difficulties.

The tests should not consist of words put together more or less at random by the teacher. Properly constructed diagnostic tests of spelling should be used as these will identify particular areas of difficulty. Alternatively children may be tested on words which have been taken from their word-lists.

It is not desirable that all children in the class should be tested on the same selection of words; the tests should reflect particular needs.

Spelling tests are often seen as competitions; tests are to identify areas of difficulty and to monitor the child's progress. There is no need for the results of such tests to be broadcast, for league tables to be published. Only the child should be made aware of his progress.

Words that the child has been unable to spell should continue to be kept in his spelling lists and should be tested until such times as the child can spell them. The child should be encouraged to persist with words that he has not yet mastered.

Some commercial spelling schemes incorporate spelling tests and on the result of these the child is assigned to a particular level of spelling. He will set himself to learn those words which occur at his spelling level. Some schemes also instruct children in the techniques to follow when learning to spell. Obviously such schemes are more supportive of a child than a list of words from which so many have to be learned each week.

There are some spelling tests which are closely related to learning activities. One such is a diagnostic approach to the teaching of spelling devised by the staff of a school in Leeds. This material is more suited to senior primary pupils but it could be adapted for use with younger children. Important within this approach is the use of a piece of dictation containing a number of spelling points in which error might occur. These points are related to a number of sentences which practise the child in the particular spelling involved. The child studies these sentences and is tested in them. The testing is done within pairs of pupils.

Supposing a child failed on a word incorporating the spelling rule 'drop final 'e' before adding '-ing''. The sentence the child is given to work on could be as follows:

'When using a tube to cure a piano out of tune make sure the tubing you are using is curing the tuning.'

Teachers may not approve of the contrived nature of this sentence but this approach does contain a number of important teaching points:

1. There has been a diagnosis of the child's spelling weakness.
2. The identification of weakness is related to the relevant remedial activities.
3. The learning is both systematic and consistent.
4. Children have responsibility for their own learning.
5. The teaching is persistent in that the child has to continue working with specific spelling rules until he demonstrates that he has mastered them.

Even if a teacher were to reject the sentences used within this scheme the basic principles involved are worthy of consideration.

Spelling rules

Should we not simply give children spelling rules? English spelling is not as irregular as is sometimes supposed. All English words obey spelling rules. Unfortunately some of these are extremely complex and of limited application. The teacher may wish to give older children a number of rules which may cover a reasonable range of words. These can be written into the child's jotter and he can be encouraged to use them. It has to be admitted that the use of spelling rules can lead to confusion and they appear to have only a limited effect on improving spelling; however, any activity that asks children to look closely at how words are built up and at recurring patterns of letters within words will have some beneficial effect – but perhaps not enough to justify the effort involved. Some rules are probably only of interest to the competent speller who may feel satisfaction that he has grasped a particularly complex rule. Many teachers would prefer to discuss spelling through the use of examples rather than rules.

The most useful rules would appear to be the following: (Some of these would require translation into more appropriate language for the child)

(i) 'i' before 'e' when pronounced /ee/ (except after 'c')
(ii) drop the final 'e' before adding '-ing' or '-ed' (except when there are two 'e's')
(iii) after a single vowel, double the consonant before adding '-ing' or '-ed' (except in multi-syllable words not ending in 'l' and not accented on the last syllable) e.g. cutting, benefitted and parallelled.
(iv) 'all', 'till', 'full' drop an 'l' when added to another word.
(v) the /k/ sound after a short vowel is written 'ck' (except multi-syllable words ending in '-ic')
(vi) no English word ends in 'i', 'j', or 'v' (except 'taxi' and 'spiv').

More important than giving children rules is children deducing their own rules from data provided by the teacher. These rules can then be tested out on other words.

Sharing words

The teacher might introduce to the class a word that interests her. Children might speculate as to its meaning and attempt to spell it. Its relationship with other words either in meaning or spelling could be discussed. The various spellings suggested by members of the group could be collected and discussed. Finding a correct spelling is not the only objective. The discussion of the various spellings, especially those that might be correct, can lead to a better understanding of how words are built up and of the rules of spelling.

Children may contribute their own words and challenge others to define or spell them. Words with special appeal can be assigned to a class word or wall display.

Inventing words

A teacher walks into a classroom and writes a word on the blackboard. The word is 'CARACOLY'. The children ask the meaning but the teacher says that it doesn't have one – yet.

Definitions begin to be offered – strong and blowy like a caracoly wind; a caracoly elephant's big and fat; my bike's caracoly – all wonky and bent; caracoly whisky – very strong.

'To gronkle' is defined as to stuff sweeties in your mouth; to camouflage yourself; to be in a bad mood; to screw up your face; to wobble along the road. 'A squumshle' is defined as a ruined house; a stuffed bird; a squashed cake; a plastic bag filled with water; mashed caterpillar soup.

What is the point of this activity? If incorporated in a session on words with a class or a group it introduces an element of fun. It encourages inventiveness and has the advantage that there are no wrong answers – but in defining the nonsense words children have to draw on other words and quite often the nonsense words evoke 'real' words which are close in sound or possible meaning.

Children can write poems or stories using nonsense words and other children have to define the words from context clues.

I am a guinea-pig.
I have been gleeping for two years now
and I am not caracoly just now.
Last time I was caracoly
I had six squumshles but lost two.
All my squumshles are gleeping now.

gleeping/growing
caracoly/pregnant
squumshles/babies

A boy writes on 'The Glubleby Baby'

'The glubleby baby was in its pram outside the gluttonous supermarket. It was very annoyed indeed. It threw everything everywhere. It looked as if it calicosle mother was going to get a grunkle. Oh that baby does look gloclebang! It looks as if it's taken a pollynut of squumshle. His bucklechuck was all collyputt with icolastipan.'

We would not recommend a regular diet of this but mixed in with other ingredients it permits inventiveness and humour in language work and the links with serious work are obvious.

The meanings in words

Many of the words we use daily contain origins which are lost to us. They lie all around us. Words for clothing provide many examples – wellingtons, jeans, cardigans and duffel-coats.

Think of the social history involved in the names, probably still used in many families, for the shoes that children change into for P.E. – gutties, plimsolls, sand shoes, saunnies, gym shoes, training shoes.

Families of such words abound and another rich source is the dialect words which persist in some families or in some parts of the country. Where a class contains children from different parts of the country or where a class is in correspondence with another school collections of dialect words can be made or exchanged.

Where children from other cultures are in the class the possibilities for such comparisons are increased. Perhaps Scottish children may be led to contemplate how many of the words we use reflect the various settlements in our country and our imperial past.

We have suggested that children should appreciate that language changes. Words may change their meanings or new words may be found for common objects. This concept could be developed by discussing words that parents and grandparents use and which are now passing out of common use: 'wireless; radio; tranny; flicks; movies; pictures; cinema; dance; disco'. Or within their own time: 'fab; magic; brill; rad'.

Looking up meanings

Dictionary work is useful – not just for finding definitions or correct spellings but for the opportunities it affords for children to pay attention to words. Classrooms should contain at least one adult dictionary in addition to school dictionaries. A thesaurus is useful in that it helps children to find words of equivalent meaning and dictionaries of personal names or place names are always of interest to children. Teachers might ask children to look up words selected from those which they see around them as the child's continuing exposure to these will reinforce his awareness of the word.

Certain brand names are fragments of words. Children may be asked to use the dictionary to find the 'parent' word and then suggest why this word was chosen.

Examples: Daz; Brillo; Lux.

The recent boom in domestic gadgetry means that children are exposed to words of classical origin. The identification of these in the dictionary will make many current neologisms more meaningful.

Examples: micro/tele/com/turbo/hydro/sonic/mini.

Children can collect lists of names of common objects, e.g. cars or planes. What do they mean and why were they chosen?

Examples: Sierra; Maestro; Jaguar; Harrier; Concorde.

The teacher may set puzzles using the dictionary or thesaurus. Simple statements may be couched in formal language. The child translates using the dictionary if necessary.

Example: Kindly consume the liquid product of a ruminant mammal of the bovine family = Drink up your milk.

Children may set such puzzles for others.

Less use is made in classrooms of the thesaurus but its provision of synonyms and the opportunity it affords for discrimination amongst words of similar meaning help develop precision in the use of words.

Children may be given lists of words relating to one theme and asked to arrange them in an ascending order, e.g. houses – mansion, shack, palace, hovel, villa, cottage, castle, chalet.

Children may be given lists of jumbled words and asked to arrange them in sets of three or four, e.g. insensitive, disagreeable, jovial, indifferent, sociable, unattractive, apathetic, vivacious, offensive, irresponsible, elated, irritating.

These activities may be related to specialised vocabularies that children have to acquire in certain subject areas. They are more active than most vocabulary exercises and do involve the child in the making of fine distinctions.

Spelling games

When children write spontaneously or are learning to write, vowels are usually the last letters to appear. It is possible for children to read words consisting of consonants as they carry the profile of the word.

The flash cards would show consonants only and children write down the words or messages. Such words might have to be displayed for a longer period and various function words might have to be included to act as cues.

my fmly: our tchr.: sprmrkt., etc.

The possible vowel elements can be discussed.

If the flash card technique proves too difficult children may write 'coded' messages.

Mt me in the plygrd at the intrvl.

Lnd me your pncl, pls.

Lst yr we wnt to Spn for our hldys.

To heighten visual awareness and build up a sense of the structure of words the teacher may display words and ask children how many other words they can see in them. (Whole word strings, rather than anagrams):

heather: heat; heath; eat; her.
courage: our; rage; age.
thinking: think; thin; in; ink; king; kin.

Television advertisements are an effective means of learning spelling because of their multi-sensory impact and frequent repetition.

Well-known words from television advertisements which embody spelling points can be used for flash card work and subsequent discussion.

Heinz: /ei/ie ceiling; niece; piece
Maclean: /cl/ea/ cling; read – head beak – bread
Kellog: /ll/bell; cell; but – /balance/below/
Smarties: /ies/ party/empty/ beauty/ but – bay/key/

Where such words show obvious differences such as ei/ie or ll/l/, y/ies/ children may be asked to make up their own rules to explain these spellings.

Children can be asked to show their visual awareness of words by representing them as an image that communicates the quality of the word.

Words like squash, twist, swell, fly, wriggle, glide, screw, smash, etc. may be used.

This exercise is of limited value but it encourages the children to use their imaginations and leads to lively sessions. Incorporated in a battery of activities it helps sharpen the child's awareness of words.

Various card games can be adapted to teach spelling. The easiest is a version of 'Snap' in which children have to match words or clusters of letters.

A form of pelmanism may be played to encourage longer memory recall. The child looks at a card containing a word or a cluster of letters. He then turns over cards spread in front of him until he turns up a matching card. He keeps the two cards and selects another card to continue the game. Obviously the sets of cards can reflect the spelling needs of individual children.

Many products and signs that children encounter use mis-spellings deliberately. Children can be presented with a list of these or with actual labels or advertisements. Children should be asked why they think manufacturers do this and they should be asked to provide the correct spelling.

Children could be asked to make a collage using labels or packets.

Examples: Ricicles: Weetabix: Ceefax: Wundaloaf: Krunchy Krisps: Whiskas: Kit-e-Kat: Kwick n' eezy eats.

One of the most serious mis-spellings is one that affects our understanding of what the writer wishes to say. This can be turned into an activity in which the child is asked to explain, literally, what a sentence means and then to supply a more appropriate spelling for the significant word.

The bus conductress had a fare face.
(This might mean the conductress looked as if she wanted you to pay your fare.)
The farmer sewed the corn.
I bought a canary for a cheep price.
The milkman kept his milk in his diary.
The noisy children ate in the dinning room.
The drunk jockey was first past the wining post.
Children may make up their own sentences.

Word gamés and spelling games, combined with more formal spelling activities, make for lively language sessions – particularly if words that appear in the child's environement, or words that he needs to know, are used.

APPENDIX 4

Language Development and Microcomputers

At present all primary schools have the use of at least one microcomputer and experience is already beginning to show that once the machine is properly integrated with the on-going curriculum the need for more than one computer per establishment becomes pressing.

Despite falling hardware costs education finds itself in economic hard times and the reality for most primary schools for the immediate future will be relatively few machines.

The initial question for microcomputer usage was once 'What can I use it for?' The question is now being replaced by another 'What can't I use it for?' This makes consideration of the use of computers for language development particularly vital since competition for the use of the machine is becoming intense.

For some time people thought computers had little to offer on the language front particularly in the light of early de-contextualised drill and practice programs in spelling.

However as increased use of computers is made in schools it has become clear that in one language respect computers have generated a lot of activity – spoken language. Whenever the children and machines are together there is a lot of talk.

The responsibility of teachers to capitalise on this is real whether the machine is being used for language, maths or any other curriculum area – just listen in to a group of children planning entries for a data base or using a Logo-type program like DART to draw shapes.

Although the opportunity presented by computers for increased oral work (fundamental to good writing) is very important we should focus on three areas where computers have a role together with some of the many points raised by this paper in developing children's written language.

1. Word Processing

The continuous interactive process of writing is essentially one of drafting, editing and revising. This process is time consuming and can be boring for many children. However experience of some schools is beginning to show that progress can be made using a good educational word processor such as EDWORD or at a simpler level PRIMARY PEN.

Use of the word processor makes the writing process, particularly in groups, more accessible to the children.

The word processor provides such facilities as:

immediate error correction on entry of text;

manipulation of chunks of text without cutting up text;

whole word or phrase entry (as in Breakthrough to Literacy) when used with a device called a Concept Keyboard;

editing of previously entered text (saved on disc) for writing sessions.

These facilities effectively put children in command of print rather than make them subject to it and problems with handwriting are circumvented.

Above all the capability of children to co-operate on pieces of group writing increases greatly. Children more readily accept criticism and writing becomes a topic worthy of greater discussion in all its aspects. The teacher input to this discussion is critical and all evidence of marking is removed as the text undergoes its evolution.

Clearly hard paper copy is necessary for children to achieve the real output of the printed word and so a printer is an important, if not vital, acquisition. The printed output is speedy and if necessary allows production of several copies sometimes with varying sorts of type setting.

Certainly the children's entry of text can initially be slow but again evidence shows that as more children have access to machines (at home as well as school) keyboard skills are better developed and at an earlier age. New devices such as the QUINKEY simplified keyboard make entry of text even easier.

Organisational implications for computer usage in this way are clear:

(i) School policy decisions must be taken regarding when word processing is to be introduced and how it is to be developed throughout the school.
(ii) Word processing can tie up a computer for long periods of time and given the short supply of machines in schools decisions must be made regarding other uses.
(iii) Most benefit will accrue in group writing situations and the word processor encourages and maintains such situations. There is also now evidence of transfer to similar work when the computer is not used.

2. Computers and Contexts for Written Work.

Adventure programs such as 'Granny's Garden', 'Adventure Island' or 'Flowers of Crystal' simulate other-world situations and are as provocative and useful in developing a whole range of language situations as for example a good novel.

Quite apart from the use of computer programs as contexts in their own right there is now the appearance of pieces of software such as the 'Desperate Journey' materials from the Jordanhill Project which create a number of further opportunities within a more accepted context for language work, in this case a novel.

Teachers are also using pieces of commercial software to enhance the context of a novel.

Both the adventure program and enrichment materials for accepted language contexts probably represent the best value for teachers in economic terms at present in that they are relatively cheap and allow teachers to make full use of teaching skills and materials which they already possess.

3. Specific Language Programs

De-contextualised spelling programs of the past are still around and need very careful handling. However some commercial software is beginning to emerge which looks at individual items of vocabulary and punctuation which could be very useful in the hands of a good teacher. TRAY and EDSPELL are two such programs. They offer the opportunity for children to explore word and sentence structures creatively.

As well as these somewhat limited programs a new range of generative programs which allow for work on language patterns has appeared (MEP Language Development Pack). Once again more work needs to be done on the evaluation of these but certainly programs like 'Wordplay' and 'Developing Tray' offer teachers useful devices to examine the underlying structure of our language.

In addition to these a range of teletext simulators (which can make screens of text which look like Ceefax) have come on the market. Programs like 'Telebook' can be used by children and teachers to make excellent electronically written responses.

In conclusion the implications for computer use and language development are clear:

(i) Careful thought needs to be given to hardware requirements in schools.
(ii) Schools have access already to a number of very useful applications which run alongside existing currently recommended language work practices.
(iii) Authorities and schools need to look at the nature of in-service offered to teachers and move towards integration of language and computer in-service to a much greater degree.

4. Sources of Software Referred To

1. 'ADVENTURE ISLAND'
   Ginn & Co. Ltd.
   Prebendal House
   Parson's Fee
   Aylesbury

2. 'DART'
AUCBE
Endymion Road
Hatfield
Herts.

3. 'DESPERATE JOURNEY'
Dept. of Inservice Education
Jordanhill College of Education
Southbrae Drive
Glasgow

4. 'EDWORD' and 'EDSPEL'
Clwyd Technics Ltd.
Antelope Industrial Estate
Rhydymwyn
Mold
Clwyd

5. 'GRANNY'S GARDEN', 'TELEBOOK' and 'FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL'
4Mation Software
Linden Lea
Rockpark
Barnstaple EX32 9AQ

6. 'MEP LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PACK'
MEP National Primary Project
St. James Hall
King Alfred's College
Winchester

7. 'PRIMARY PEN'
GED Educational Software
70 Stoke Road
Bletchley
Milton Keynes

8. 'TRAY'
Microelectronic Educational Programme
Cheviot House
Coach Lane Campus
NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE
NE7 7XA

Bibliography

1. BEARD, R. CHILDREN'S WRITING IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL. HODDER AND STOUGHTON, IN ASSOCIATION WITH U.K.R.A. 1984
   This book presents a comprehensive review of children's writing: it examines various pieces of research and theoretical approaches; it reviews the history of the 'creative writing' movement; it emphasises the importance of handwriting at the early stages. The author develops Kinneavy's model of writing in considering the written text as a product of the interaction among the writer (expressive writing), the audience (persuasive writing) and the world (referential writing). The assessment and improvement of writing is discussed in terms of planning and imposing strategies, spelling, vocabulary, syntactic structures and punctuation.

2. CALKINS, L. M. LESSONS FROM A CHILD. ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF WRITING. HEINEMANN 1983
   This book is very much in the romantic tradition of child-centred education. Everything seems to happen without much input from the teacher: the children choose their writing topics, re-draft their writing, use each other as audience, test out 'leads', even sort out their Oedipal conflicts – and all this apparently with only the facilitating effect of the presence of teacher and researcher. Which is why the book is called 'Lessons from a Child' of course. May Calkins has worked with Donald Graves and much can be seen of his approach, but whereas he was quite prescriptive (see the Graves entry in this bibliography) Miss Calkins is much less informative about what she expects teachers to do as regards the development of children's writing. Nevertheless, for its insights into the writing process and for the account of the development of one child's writing, this book can be commended.

3. CLAY, M. M. WHAT DID I WRITE? HEINEMANN 1975
   This book grew from the author's observation that although teachers with reception classes mostly respond sensitively to their pupils' learning problems, there were times when they did not observe that poor language responses could lead some children into later confusions about writing. These confusions arise from the child's attempts to understand the many arbitrary conventions involved in conveying in writing the ideas he expresses naturally in speech. Prof. Clay uses samples of 5 year olds writing to generate and exemplify a variety of principles and concepts (including some theoretical links with reading) to help teachers sharpen their observations of their children's efforts.

4. DEAN J. ROOM TO LEARN: LANGUAGE AREA. EVANS 1972
   This slim volume is one of a series dealing with the day to day problems of fitting a given number of children and the equipment they need for the variety of activities they will undertake into the classroom or teaching area available. The many line illustrations and photographs interspersed with text provide essentially practical solutions to the logistical problems all primary teachers face.

5. DEAN, J. ORGANISING LEARNING IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM. CROOMHELM 1983
   Joan Dean offers a clear systematic way of examining and resolving organisational issues in this book. The student or beginning teacher can use her ideas to help in the planning of children's learning; the experienced teacher can use them for appraising the effectiveness of his/her classroom organisation. The tabular and sectionalised format make it easy to refer to specific problem areas where clear and practical analysis and suggested solutions can be found.

7. DUNSBEE, T. AND FORD T. MARK MY WORDS. WARD LOCK EDUCATIONAL, IN ASSOCIATION WITH N.A.T.E. 1980
   The writers consider and, as might be expected, generally criticise the cumulative effect of traditional marking techniques in the writing of one boy as he progresses through secondary school. Variations in marking and correcting strategies are noted as unhelpful. The note of the peer group in receiving, evaluating and correcting each others' writing is commended. Finally, the negotiation of what is acceptable in terms of the task set, the writer's skills, and conventional demands is put forward

for consideration. Most of the examples come from a secondary school situation, but nonetheless a primary teacher will find many points of interest and help.

8. GRAVES, D. M. WRITING: TEACHERS AND CHILDREN AT WORK. HEINEMANN 1983
As its sub-title suggests, this book concentrates on the activities involved in writing. Graves approaches the problems and difficulties which both pupils and teachers face with direct and specific advice. He deals, among others, with classroom and curricular organisation and management, pupil/teacher interaction and record-keeping as well as handwriting, spelling and questioning. There is no obvious attempt to discuss writing within the wider perspectives of psychological and linguistic theories. This can be a problem in terms of understanding the advice being offered.

9. JORDAN, A. J. THE CHILD AND THE MICRO-COMPUTER: AN EVALUATION OF TWO METHODS OF TEXT/DATA ENTRY. Unpublished B.Ed(Hons) dissertation obtainable from Alan J. Jordan, Mandale Middle School, Cooper Lane, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD6 3WW. (Price: £2)
The problems that a conventional typewriter keyboard present to a young children doing word processing was the starting point for this study. In this attempt to evaluate the standard QWERTY keyboard in comparison with the Quinkey keyboard produced by Microwriter Ltd., a number of interesting implications concerning the use of computers in schools are highlighted.

10. KRESS, G. LEARNING TO WRITE. ROUTLEDGE 1982
Kress says his reason for writing this book 'was the realisation that the fact that nothing could be seen in or said about early (age 6–12 years) writings of children had a great potential for harm. It could lead too readily to the assumption that there was, quite simply, nothing in the texts to say anything about, and that that was due to the limited abilities of the children who write the texts'. The major focus of the book is the difference between speech and writing where Kress not only explores the typical contexts and social settings of writing in some detail, but also examines the active involvement of children in the learning of writing.

11. PEARCE, J. ON TEACHING THE CATCHING OF SPELLING in EDUCATION 3-13, VOL 11, NO 1, 1983, pp 12–17
In this article Pearce argues that there is, despite popular mythology, a trustworthy system underlying English spelling. He attempts to identify this system by the use of 'word families' and has many practical suggestions on how to use these in developing spelling and dictionary activities which are both useful and enjoyable. He makes the distinction between surface errors (i.e. careless slips) and deep seated errors (hangovers from early misconceptions) which need specific remediation. Aimed at P4–P7 in the main.

13. PETERS, M. AND CRIPPS, C. APPRAISAL OF CURRENT SPELLING MATERIALS – A CONSUMER'S GUIDE. UNIVERSITY OF READING [198?]
This is a careful and detailed analysis of 56 spelling schemes/books published between 1932 and 1978. It provides a host of information which can help teachers decide whether any given material will suit not only the needs of their children, but the size of their budget as well.

14. PETERS, M. AND CRIPPS, P. CATCHWORDS: IDEAS FOR TEACHING SPELLING 2ND ED. HARCOURT BRACE. JOVANOVICH 1978
Although this is a manual intended to be used primarily in conjunction with the Catchwords spelling programme, it nevertheless deals initially with the many issues in the teaching of spelling, both theoretical and practical, which are the concern of those who care about spelling. 'Personal Questions and Responses' is particularly helpful.

15. SCARDAMALIA, M., BEREITER, C. AND FILLION, B. WRITING FOR RESULTS: A SOURCEBOOK OF CONSEQUENTIAL COMPOSING ACTIVITIES. ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION 1981. (May be ordered from Scottish Council for Research in Education)
Contains sixty suggestions for writing activities with clear task objectives in the following areas: coping with various kinds of writing (genres), planning, topic development, language features (vocabulary, usage, spelling), style, coherence, evaluation, and revision. This book is not a writing

programme nor does it present theoretical underpinning, but it is a practical sourcebook of supplementary activities suitable for upper primary and secondary pupils. The authors claim to adopt a 'cognitive' approach to writing, i.e. with the emphasis on the thinking processes and problem-solving strategies required for writing.

16. SCOLA PUBLICATIONS
(a) Hand in your Writing. SCDS 1982
(b) Mr. Togs the Tailor: A context for writing. SCDS 1983
These two documents published by the Scottish Committee on Language Arts in the Primary School are related in the sense that the latter is an exemplification of one of the issues in the former. 'Hand in your Writing' seeks to change teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of writing by demonstrating how the current theories of writing can be applied in practical and interesting ways in the classroom. 'Mr. Togs the Tailor' is a case history of how one teacher with a P2 class created a context within the classroom which provided a focus and stimulus for the children's writing. It relates this experience to the theoretical issues raised in 'Hand in your Writing'.
(c) Foundations of Writing Project. SCDS 1986
This project was involved with the teaching of writing during the first three years of primary school. The report and the classroom materials associated with it provide teachers with a theoretical and practical basis for teaching young children to communicate effectively through writing.
(d) Scottish English. SCDS 1980
This is a discussion document which aims to raise the teacher's awareness of the importance to individual children of so-called non-standard English. Diversity of language should be seen as a source of strength and not of weakness, and therefore constant correction to achieve monolingualism is undesirable.

17. SMITH, F. WRITING AND THE WRITER. HEINMANN 1982
This book is an investigation into the act of writing. The author focusses on fluent writers in order to try and determine what a child must achieve in order to become a writer. Smith does not offer specific exercises or programmes of work, but rather a framework for thinking about the act of writing in both theoretical and practical ways.

18. STIBBS, A. 'MARKING AND RESPONSE: A DIALOGUE ABOUT WRITTEN WORK' IN MINNS, H. ET AL, ENGLISH (LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING SERIES; 3). WARD LOCK 1981
Whilst this article deals with the problems of marking secondary pupils' writing the points which Stibbs makes apply equally to the less than ideal situations found in many primary schools. Primarily, the author is offering practical guidance and advice on ways of overcoming the difficulty of communicating the teacher's response to a script marked in the pupil's absence. His internal monologue is, however, an illuminating insight into what that response should be.

19. STUBBS, M. LANGUAGE AND LITERACY: THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF READING AND WRITING. ROUTLEDGE 1980
This book attempts to provide the basis for a theory about the relations between reading and writing, written and spoken language and the place and purposes of written language in society. The author has assumed no previous knowledge of linguistics on the part of the reader, and presents his arguments in a clear, logical way.

20. TODD, J. LEARNING TO SPELL: A RESOURCE BOOK FOR TEACHERS. BLACKWELL 1982
A practical book about the teaching of spelling. The author challenges a number of spelling myths: the 'catching' of spelling through reading, the use of spelling rules and mnemonics, the phonic based approach to spelling, the simplistic categorisation of learner difficulties. 'Spelling should be thought of as a discovery activity stemming from the child's interests, rather than a set of rigid exercises.' Much useful advice on the early stages of spelling, when again some accepted notions are challenged. A model for the spelling curriculum for the whole school is presented. The testing of spelling and advice to parents are also examined.

21. TORBE, M. TEACHING SPELLING. WARD LOCK 1977
'Teaching Spelling' has proved to be a invaluable aid to teachers of poor spellers of all ages. It sets out in clear, practical language how to identify the underlying causes of failure in spelling and what to do to remedy it. Torbe not only shows how to make corrections but provides suggestions for teaching strategies and games for classroom use.

22. TRUDGILL, P. W. ACCENT, DIALECT AND THE SCHOOL (EXPLORATIONS IN LANGUAGE STUDY). EDWARD ARNOLD 1975
This book explores the teachers' attitudes towards language and its use by all members of the classroom community. Trudgill provides a 'plain man's guide to the true character of accent and dialect' in order to help teachers to reconsider their response to these two aspects of language which often conceals a hidden judgement of class, status or intelligence. This revealing book is an essential aid to all who would attempt to follow the recommendations of the Bullock Report in providing children with a sense of security born of the knowledge that their teacher accepts and values them for what they are.

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Footnote: The positions indicated were those which members held at the time of their appointment to the committees.